THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZIN

ELLERY QUEEN'S

Mystery Magazine

AUGUST 50¢ 1964

SHORT NOVEL—COMPLETE!

ELLERY QUEEN

The Death of Don Juan

"a prime specimen of the true whodunit, complete with baffling clues and faultless amateur detection"
—Anthony Boucher

SPECIAL

Françoise Sagan
A Craving for Violence

9 NEW SHORT STORIES

GERALD KERSH

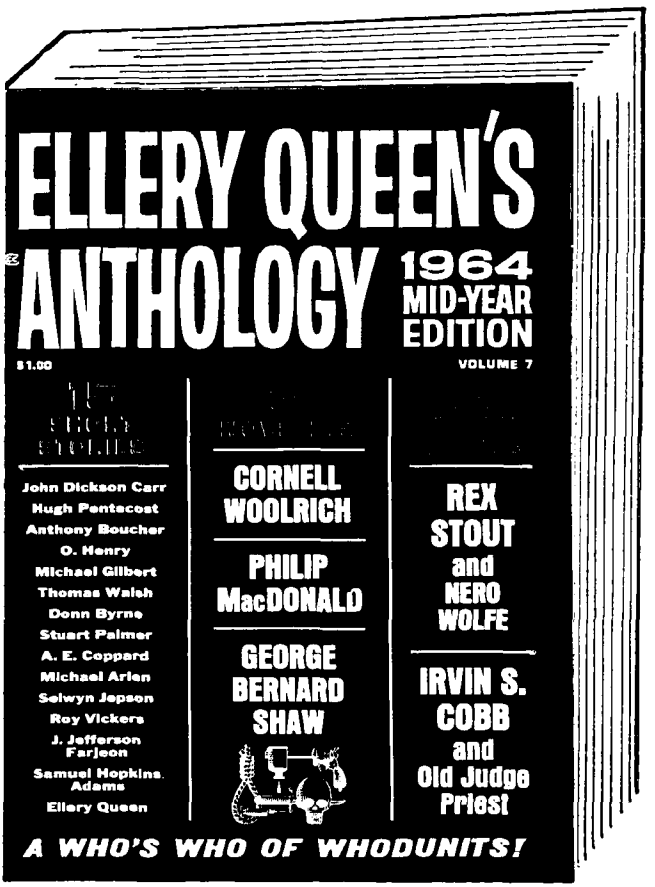
DOROTHY B. HUGHES

AVRAM DAVIDSON

32 EXTRA PAGES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ORDER YOUR COPY NOW!



Look at the line-up of authors—you won't want to miss reading a single story.

Use the coupon on the right—your copy will be rushed to you to enjoy the most suspenseful fiction you've ever read.

Turn to page 128 for extra coupon

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY
505 Park Avenue • New York, N.Y. 10022

Please send me _____ copy(ies) of ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY for which I am enclosing $1.00 per copy. (Price includes postage in the U.S.A.)

Name _____
(Please print)

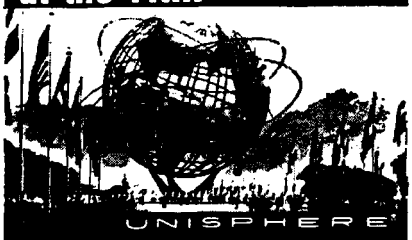
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITED BY
ANTHONY
BOUCHER*
BEST
DETECTIVE
STORIES OF THE YEAR
19TH ANNUAL EDITION
A treasury of mystery and suspense fiction edited by the N.Y. Times' expert on matters criminal.*
$3.95 at all bookstores DUTTON

VISIT US
at the FAIR



Better Living Center
Second Floor
DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC.

An unorthodox mystery...
introducing the most exasperating master of detection* since Father Brown

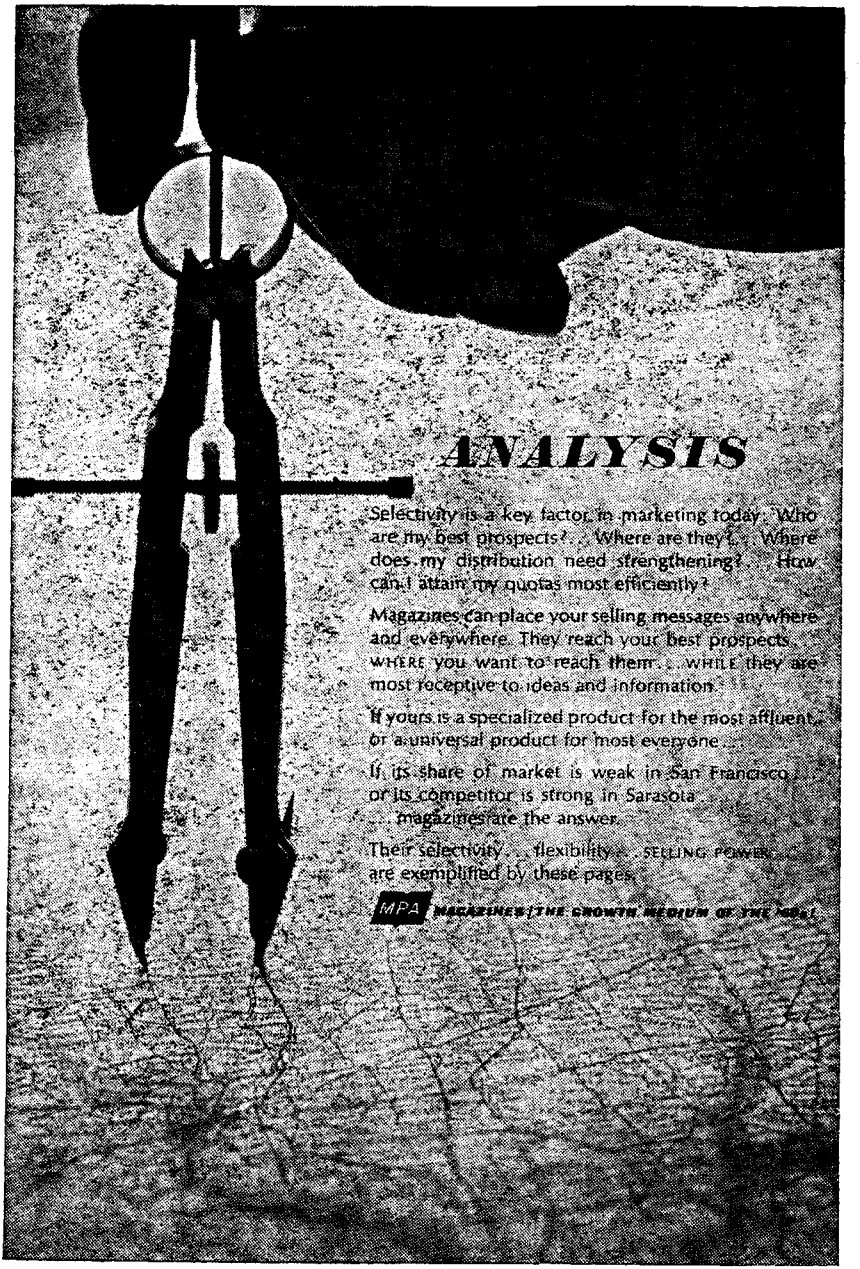
*he can see the third side of any question

Friday THE RABBI SLEPT LATE

By HARRY KEMELMAN
creator of the
Nicky Welt stories in EQMM

$3.95, now at your bookstore Crown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


ANALYSIS
Selectivity is a key factor in marketing today. Who are my best prospects? . . Where are they? . . Where does my distribution need strengthening? . . How can I attain my quotas most efficiently?
Magazines can place your selling messages anywhere and everywhere. They reach your best prospects WHERE you want to reach them . . WHILE they are most receptive to ideas and information.
If yours is a specialized product for the most affluent . . or a universal product for most everyone . . .
If its share of market is weak in San Francisco . . or its competitor is strong in Sarasota . . . magazines are the answer.
Their selectivity . . flexibility . . SELLING POWER . . are exemplified by these pages.
MPA MAGAZINES: THE GROWTH MEDIUM OF THE '60's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL—complete

THE DEATH OF DON JUAN — *Ellery Queen* — 18–57–129

5 CRIME SHORT STORIES

HONOR AMONG THIEVES — *Gerald Kersh* — 6

THE PLANTING OF COUSIN CURLY — *Arthur Moore* — 67

A QUIET ROOM WITH A VIEW — *Avram Davidson* — 79

SOCIAL CALL — *Marjorie Riddell* — 123

A CRAVING FOR VIOLENCE — *Françoise Sagan* — 142

5 DETECTIVE SHORT STORIES

INSTRUMENTS OF VIOLENCE — *Harry Sylvester* — 32

AN OLD WIVES' TALE — *Wenzell Brown* — 42

DANGER AT DEERFAWN — *Dorothy B. Hughes* — 99

COFFEE HOUSE CAPER — *April Aarons* — 114

DEATH IN THE AIR — *Allen Kim Lang* — 149

EQMM "FIRST STORY"

MAN IN A WHEEL CHAIR — *M. J. Kelly* — 90

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 56

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — *Anthony Boucher* — 113

PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 43, No. 8, Whole No. 249, AUG., 1964. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at 50¢ a copy. Annual subscription $6.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $7.00 in the Pan American Union; $7.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N. H. Editorial and General Offices, 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 505 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second-Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. *© 1964 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

JOEL DAVIS, *Assistant Publisher* CLAYTON RAWSON, *Managing Editor*

MELVIN FLAMM, *Business Manager* CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Executive Editorial Secretary*

FRANK TAGGART, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *newest* Karmesin story by

GERALD KERSH

It was EQMM that introduced Karmesin to the American reading public. The first two Karmesin stories appeared in our November 1945 issue—almost 20 years ago! To date, 11 adventures of Karmesin have been published in EQMM, and here is the 12th—the newest Karmesin caper—with, you will be happy to learn, more promised . . .

In "Honor Among Thieves" Karmesin's adversary is a mastermind named "Carfax." Gerald Kersh gives his word that the character of "Carfax" is based on a real-life person—with name changed, of course. To quote Mr. Kersh: "Conan Doyle thought he had an arch-villain in Professor Moriarty, but compared with Carfax, Moriarty was a mere petty larcenist. In real life, Carfax was vastly larger than he is in fiction. I am not exaggerating when I tell you that a great military general, both strategic and tactical, was lost in Carfax."

Quoting Mr. Kersh further: "Carfax's ramifications are fantastic. One would not be going too far in classifying him as a criminal of genius. For example: You remember the Yugoslavian who ran a factory for the manufacture of gold coins? He was merely one of Carfax's hired help. Carfax stole the bullion or coins and shipped it to the factory. There it was minted, or reminted, with gold added*—so that the gold content of Carfax's coins gave better value than those of the Mint! His ten-dollar gold piece was worth ten dollars sixty; his pound, twenty-four shillings. The law couldn't touch him!" . . .*

If further Karmesin-Carfax duels are recorded by Mr. Kersh—and we hope they will be—we'll tell you more about the incredible "Carfax" . . . and more, too, about the origin of the magnificent Karmesin who, you must remember, is either the greatest criminal or the greatest liar of his time. We have this on no less an authority than that of Karmesin's creator, Gerald Kersh—and who should know better?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HONOR AMONG THIEVES

by GERALD KERSH

IT WAS A NOTABLE CRIMINAL INdeed that caused Karmesin to raise an eyebrow or twitch his mustache—so when I said that a man named Carfax had never been caught, there occurred a certain convulsion in the features of Karmesin. First, his eyebrows went up and his mustache came down; next, his eyebrows leveled themselves and his mustache spread itself; then he laughed. And when Karmesin laughed, it was a sort of internecine incident: everything shook—yet he made little sound.

"Poor Carfax!" said Karmesin.

"Not so poor," I said. "Carfax got away with millions. Scotland Yard knows all about it—he fenced, fiddled, and organized. He rides about in a super-Rolls. Admit, Karmesin, that he must have made more than a couple of millions, and was never caught—"

"Never *what?* Never prosecuted, you mean," said Karmesin. "Neither was I. But *caught*, in the colloquial sense of the term? There I beg to differ." And locking his enormous hands, glaring at me under his portentous eyebrows and making full play of his plumlike eyes, he went on, "Carfax's liquid assets were two million, five hundred and thirty thousand, seven hundred pounds in bullion, American dollars, and Swiss francs. I happen to know.

"But his fortune is gone, and his prestige is gone, and worst of all, he has lost face in his own filthy milieu. Once upon a time anyone who took a shilling from Carfax would be found at ebbtide in the Thames, in the region of Greenwich, in an advanced state of decomposition. Now, he could not even get your arm broken . . . Why, I took a fortune off him as easily—at least with less outcry—as one might take a sugarstick from a child.

"It was in the autumn of the year 1945—or was it 1955?—and my peregrinations had taken me to a certain hotel not far from Hyde Park, which was a most peculiar hangout of black marketeers, visiting film stars, and all that. Case in point: once, in the lounge, a harassed physician said to me, 'I have seven hundred and fifty cases of malaria—' whereupon a man took him aside and asked, 'How much a bottle?'

"Because, although the war was over, there was in the civilian population something worse—I mean, a hangover of war: the morning after is always worse than the night before. Whereas in wartime your black marketeers had tended to load, and overload, now they felt certain misgivings.

"I daresay you know there was a Black Exchange in coupons, and so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forth. In the underworld it was a bull market today and a bear market tomorrow—an awkward time for a hard-working petty criminal, or spiv, to be operating. For at any moment the Chancellor of the Exchequer might declare such-and-such an item, in which some spiv had invested a large sum of money, *off* the ration.

"To proceed: I was in the bar of this certain hotel—let us call it the Barchester—drinking a little glass of sound brandy, when there came to my nostrils, which are sensitive at the best of times, an unmistakable odor which I challenge the *perfumiers* of the world to duplicate: the odor of a 'skate's eyeball.' In case you want to try it, put a pickled onion in neat Holland's gin and beer, and rinse and swallow. This, on the breath of a man who is afraid of dentists: work it out.

"I lit a cigar and without turning my head I said 'Carfax! Sit down. Stop breathing down my neck or I'll be compelled to go upstairs for a bath and a clean collar.'" . . .

So Carfax sat down and offered me a drink (continued Karmesin), but when I said that this was my table and would he please order what he wanted—as if I did not know—he called for a wineglassful of Holland's gin, and produced from one of his pockets a little jar of pickled onions.

I said to him, "If you have anything to tell me, Carfax, please be good enough to turn your chair sideways and say it out of the other corner of your mouth."

He did nothing of the sort. Instead, he made me a kind of stream-of-consciousness, which ran somewhat as follows: "Karmesin, you're the one man in the world I'd cut my right hand orf to see. My left, also . . . Karmesin, I know the boys, I've known 'em since Eddie Guerin escaped from Devil's Island, but never no one I could honestly trust. Of all the tealeafs I ever met, only you can work alone—"

'Tealeaf,' I need scarcely tell you, my young friend, is cant for 'thief.' Try as he might, this fellow Carfax could not refrain from being offensive; everybody knows that I disapprove of slang. However, keeping a smokescreen between myself and his skate's eyeball, I said nothing while Carfax went on.

"Yes, there's the trouble with the wide boys—they got to have a pal. And believe me, Karmesin, it's been the downfall of too many. But sometimes a one-feller kind of style gets a bloke in a jam, if you get what I mean, and it's then he needs a pal—for a consideration, mind you, for a consideration which is considerable . . ."

He had another skate's eyeball and added, "I'm not much to look at, perhaps."

"Perhaps?" I said. "Perhaps you think it pays dividends to put my legs under the same table with you? Carfax, I know that you can whistle up a mad-doggery of slashers, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have not been afraid of the most desperate scum on earth from here to Marseilles, from Marseilles to Bucharest, from Bucharest to Hong Kong, and—" But he did not seem to hear me.

"Now I'm the boss, I'm like a king," he said, "but who can I trust? For little jobs, sure, I got a decent bunch of boys. They'd swing for anybody I put the finger on, and never squeal! Much good it'd do them if they did, because the world is a little place and—get what I mean?—they wouldn't die of old age. You can trust a bloke with your life, you can trust a bloke with your wife, but where will you find a bloke you can trust with money?"

I said, "Yes, my friend. There's the point."

"Believe me," said Carfax, "a gentleman is bloody hard to find—I don't mean somebody that's been to Oxford and Cambridge, because they're the worst of the lot; and I don't mean somebody that talks with his mouth full of hot potatoes like you, because they're two a penny and always turn yeller in the end. What I mean is, one o' Nature's gentlemen, like me!"

He fixed another skate's eyeball, and went on, "These Mayfair boys think they're gentlemen because they get their suits made in Savile Row. La-de-da! My boys, I had 'em outfitted during the war by a tailor in Black Lion Yard, and—"

I said, "*He*, I happen to know, Carfax, made them a secret lining and—"

"That's right. Every one of 'em could carry 24,000 clothes coupons, food coupons, and whatnot, and every one of 'em was dressed smart. Up to a point you can trust a man—say, 24,000 coupons at a couple of shillings apiece; deduct expenses, and it's only a matter of a few hundred pounds. Yes? All right. But—"

I said, "I know your problem, Carfax, but before I offer an opinion I will thank you for a consultant's fee: one hundred pounds, in one-pound notes." He affected not to hear, so I added, "What about the matter of orange-concentrate during the war?"

He said, "One four-ounce rationed bottle is allowed to a sixteen-pound baby. Dilute, get your bottles, and it's 'Genuine' orange juice, five shillings a go . . . What are you looking at me like that for? You're an educated man—what's Economics? Taking advantage of a necessity—in other words, filling up a hole. *That's* Economics. Strike me blind, but if I'd been in a legitimate way of business I might have been in the Cabinet by now!"

"But under current circumstances, you are a victim of bureaucracy?" I said.

"Listen, Karmesin, I had an Organization tight as a drum and a mob clean as a whistle, that's agreed. Comes something ten times tighter—I mean to say, we live under a sort of criminal system. Say, for exam-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple, that you have put aside a few thousand pounds, and say, for example, that I get wind of it and split. What happens? I get a reward as Common Informer. If that isn't an organized stool pigeon, what is?"

I repeated, "One hundred pounds fee, Carfax, before I express—"

"Now I've got as lovely a bunch of boys as you could meet within spitting distance on a dusty day; but I pay 'em by the job, and provide bail when necessary. Karmesin, they love me like a father, and whatnot. I taught 'em all they know. They are as ignorant as dirt. Play both ends against the middle—that's Carfax's lay. Every one of 'em watches the other like a cat watches a mouse—but there's only two boys I can trust, my two sons. If anything happens to me they inherit, through their mother. Karmesin, I'm getting on in years, and in the middle of the night I get a feeling like something's pressing exactly where you give a man the boot—" he pointed to his solar plexus "—so the little bit I saved up, the actuaries are after. They're scratching, Karmesin, they're digging."

"Little bit?" I said. "To be specific, Carfax, the sum must be in the neighborhood of—"

"Look, Karmesin, I'll tell you because it's no secret—" his voice was hoarse as he explained "—but since 1939 I've stacked up a pile of the dosh, only—"

"Only you dare not bank it, and you dare not invest it," I said. "Is that not so?"

"Why, the police of two continents couldn't put salt on *my* tail," he said. "The Government, left alone—you can fiddle your way through—but the Yanks are nibbling at 'em. Something to do with a few million cartons of P-X cigarettes before D-Day. Well, I mean to say! You know I switched trucks and lifted half a million pounds in Bank of England bullion from the airport, shipped it to Yugoslavia, and had it minted into genuine coins, which I shipped back. The overhead was something terrible, but *that* I got away with. Murder I can get away with—put it like this: dead men tell no tales.

"Ah, you can hide anything you like, except money. Not to talk shop, I daresay I could be hung many times over and police know it, but they can't make a case against me—not a tittle of evidence. I've been grilled off and on for the past forty years by the cops, in the days when they were free with their hands too, but I never came across anything so dastardly cruel as the actuaries—the you-know-who. Kind of put yourself in my position. I've got a little bit o' property—put yourself in my position . . ."

Know with whom I was dealing, I said, "For the third and last time, Carfax—one hundred pounds, in one-pound notes."

As I expected, he said, "I could run to twenty-five pounds—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whereupon, to his infinite astonishment, I replied, "Very well, Carfax, very well."

Then, having put the money in my pocket, I summed up: "Carfax, that you are a most notorious and sickening son of a dog is common knowledge in heaven and on earth. If you think you fool me for one instant, you never made a greater mistake in your misspent life. Long before the war brought the Yanks here or created shortages so that you could become one of the ringleaders of the Black Market, you were a rich man. Friend Carfax, I know you to be fence of thirty to forty years standing. What do you take me for? The little boy you pushed through the fanlight of a bank window and rewarded with a few pieces of silver?"

"The kid done it of his own free will," said Carfax.

"After you had shown him a razor. Sir, I am no such child. As I calculate it, you have accumulated—you were always a mean creature—something in the region of three million pounds, and now the most terrifying body of men in the world is closing in on you. Never mind Scotland Yard, never mind M.I.5, never mind Interpol—commend me, brother, to Inland Revenue, your bugbear. If you declare your earnings or gains, about 99 per cent will be forfeited. So what you want me to do is clear the way for you to reinvest at a high profit your illicit fortune of—"

Carfax interjected, "You exaggerate the sum, you know."

"I was not born yesterday," I proceeded. "All you can do with your miserable money is bury it in a hole in the ground. But while *you* might be content with that, your wife would certainly not. Meantime, you are watched, and what you have you dare not spend."

"It's true the Inland Revenue has got narks and informers everywhere," said Carfax.

"In fine, you want an outlet for your money?" I persisted.

"Well, all right."

"What outlet?" I asked. "Where an outlet? Carfax, it is my business to know what goes on in the world. Your only outlet is the United States of America. Your capital is in mixed currency, jewelry, and bullion—"

"Is it?" said Carfax.

I replied, "Now look here, Carfax, having taken your twenty-five pounds I will give you the general line. Point One: 'Good as gold' used to be a notable phrase in England, but gold in England is no longer that good—brother, you wouldn't get three jumps away with your bullion. Point Two: Speaking of well-known jewelry, you have Lady Elphick's diamonds, worth on the open market a matter of two hundred thousand pounds. Point Three: You played the race course with Straight-as-a-Gun Ziggy, and came out with a fat profit—don't deny it, Carfax, I know you paid Ziggy two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thousand five hundred pounds for 'fixing.' Right?

"To go on," I continued, "you've got foreign currency which is more than your liberty is worth to push in the market. No, sir, you've got to get that load to France, and *then* to the United States. Contradict me if you dare!"

Carfax said, "Well, I wouldn't mind getting the stuff across the Channel and make a deal in France, if you get what I mean?"

"Yes, Carfax, you can change it into something no larger than four volumes of the works of Charles Dickens," I said. "And these you can get to American by one courier or another, and the contents you already know where to flog in that country." And I knew perfectly well, of course, what he would exchange his fortune for: four hollow volumes full of heroin, cocaine, and morphine. So I added, "H, C, and M?"

"A word to the wise is sufficient," said Carfax. "Do you want to cooperate?"

"On a percentage basis, naturally," I said.

"And what would you call a percentage basis?" he asked.

"My dear Carfax, I am a man of business. First of all, there is a fee for transportation to France in which I include certain actuarial risks: you must assume, Carfax, that my income is not low, and you must also assume that, if anything goes wrong, I am liable as an accessory to about ten years in prison. I am afraid that I must insist on twenty thousand pounds in advance, since you are carrying about three million. Otherwise, no deal."

"Karmesin, you're off your rocker! Call it ten thousand, and we'll discuss."

"Go to the devil," I said.

We settled for £15,000—fool though Carfax was, he knew how to make a bargain.

He said, "How do we get the stuff over? And how do I get back? Little boat?"

"Plane," I said. "I have a good clean transport. I can drop you within twenty miles of Paris, put you in a car, bag and baggage, and . . . This is important: you must tell me how long you are likely to keep me waiting."

"A matter of four hours. But where's your plane?"

"Between Bedford and Northampton. Private airfield," I said. "You will come with me by train, Carfax. If I guess rightly, one or two of your young men will be following by car—or your two sons, perhaps?"

Carfax said, "The trouble is, every dirty yobbo thinks, already, he's an executive—you can't spit on a foggy night without hitting an Al Capone. Believe me, I know. Like I said, there's only two boys in the world—apart from yourself—that I trust, and they are my sons. And they don't trust each other . . . Who's the pilot?"

Now my pilot was a discreet fel-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

low, an ex-night-fighter who had made himself a marriage, got himself a little boy, and was trying to get a job doing stunts for the movies. His name was Flight Lieutenant Landry; he could not get a position in civil aviation because of honorable injuries.

However, I said, "Carfax the least said the better. We have all fallen into the soup in our time. In any case, I'll stand by."

He said, "I'll bet you will. But come on now, fair play, eh? You'll stand by me, but a couple of my boys will stand by you, Karmesin. I ought to warn you that I arm 'em with—"

"Save your breath which, I may say, is redolent. You arm your boys with .25 automatics loaded with steel-jacketed bullets. They make little noises, but have penetrative power—as witness the case of Happy Medium Michaelson, who weighed a matter of two hundred and sixty pounds. Carfax, there is nothing you can tell me about yourself that I do not already know."

Carfax said grudgingly, "This I know. But you get your pay only when I'm safe back in England."

"With your little parcels? Very well, Carfax—not that I approve of what the French call *stupéfiants*, and the English call narcotics."

He said, "Supply and demand. We've all got to fiddle a little—I mean to say, if I didn't somebody else would . . . What more do you want?"

"Nothing more," I said. "Three days from now I will pick you up at Euston in time for the seven o'clock train—I have not the slightest doubt that a couple of your young men will be following in the souped-up Cadillac?"

"How did you know it was a Cadillac?"

Disdaining to reply, I said, "Seven o'clock Thursday evening, at Euston station, Carfax, and you have my word on it that you will be delivered safe on English soil, with nothing to embarrass you."

"I'd better be, you know."

"Meet me, then, and we'll take off from my private airport."

Carfax said, "I've got to have a hand with me, Karmesin, because—not to lie to you—I'm carrying weight, and I've got a bit of the old blood pressure. The buzzing, if you get what I mean, between the ears and up the back of the neck—"

I said, "Enough! Thursday."

"Ah, but you don't get a penny, you know, until I'm safe back?"

I said, "This has already been discussed. Good evening."

So Carfax went his way and I went mine, and as I walked—always with an object in view—I argued with myself, as follows: Take this creature: he is almost too clever to live. Who is the greatest fool in the world? Why, the cleverest, because he grows to be the most vain . . .

Then I went to one of those Fun Fairs, one of those places where peo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple flirt with death. I say "flirt" advisedly, because there is no intention of a consummation. The same thing happens in love-making, with which I am not concerned this past forty years—there are women who, as the saying goes, "tease."

By the same token, there are people who love to tease the Old Man With the Scythe. Thus, the apparently dangerous fun and games—roller coasters and whatnot—are vastly popular in these places of amusement. By the same token, too, immense popularity attaches to games where you throw things, fire small arms, and so on.

Now in this particular Fun Fair there was young Flight Lieutenant Landry, who owned a concession. He had been in trouble in his time, and I had helped his mother a bit—a pound here, a pound there, what's the difference? The boy Landry got into bad company; he got into quite good company a few years later, when he became a night-fighter in the Battle of Britain.

Landry was one of those boys with a peculiar knack for machinery and and with a sense of quiet desperation—the two go together. Fearing everything, he set his teeth and feared nothing. He was shot down somewhere and lost an arm. The War being over, I advised him that now was the time for gaiety: in point of fact, I helped him to purchase an old transport plane which, while on the ground, could go through all the gyrations of a night-fighter—at sixpence for two minutes. It was a popular attraction. These flirtations with death at the Fairs! It upset the customers horribly, but they loved it . . .

So I went to Landry and said I wanted a favor, for which I'd be prepared to pay. He said to me, "I owe you plenty of favors, Mr. Karmesin. Don't talk about pay. Name the favor."

Pointing to his machine, I said, "This contraption: it can loop-the-loop, roll, dip, drop, and all that?"

"All that, and tail-spin too."

"Is it transportable, Landry?"

"Oh, yes. I load her on a tractor. She can't fly, you know, but I can cover the country with the old cow.

I then said, "I don't know what you make a day around here. But I will guarantee you one thousand pounds for twenty-four hours of your time and the use of this lump of ironmongery. Do you happen to have a strong and resolute friend?"

"There's Cheerful Charlie, who helps around the lot—he was my favorite E.R.K. Bit short-sighted, and weighs fourteen stone. Was nearly heavyweight champion of the Air Force, only—you know how it is—couldn't keep his chin down. Stuck his face forward and his neck out. We used to call him the turtle—but game as a pheasant, and will fight like a stag; and what with the beatings he's taken, his face is something to haunt your dreams. But what's the gen? Is it legit?"

"It is not merely legitimate," I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, "it is humanitarian. Bring your machinery and Cheerful Charlie to Nobbut in Northamptonshire. It is a flat piece of country, distinguished only by the fact that the demented poet William Cowper and his pet hare lived nearby; it also is not far from Bedford which, as you know, gave out a slightly deranged tinker named John Bunyan who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

"Arriving at Nobbut, inquire for Karmesin's Field. When you get there, set up this piece of nonsense, you and your turtle, and wait for me. You will find it best to set up near a prefabricated hut—a Waiting Room—which I'll provide. It is also my intention that you and your turtle carry arms—unloaded. These I have: one, a U.S. Army .45 automatic; the other, an English revolver of the same caliber. Now here is five hundred pounds, and I rely on you, my boy."

Landry did not want the money, but he finally took it and agreed to be with Charlie and his plane at the appointed spot somewhat in advance of the appointed time. There was to be discreet lighting—very discreet. He introduced me to Charlie the Erk, and I could not have wished for a better man. He had a military bearing, but it was at an angle of about thirty degrees, and his ears were thickened. Put yourself in a crate with that man, and you might come out badly; only he was wearing a pair of Army-issue steel-rimmed glasses, and even so he had to get within two feet of an object before he could discern it.

I said to Landry, "You will be pilot, of course—let this one be a steward. Buy him a white jacket—I leave it to you."

So I went back to Carfax and told him to get set. In his usual manner he said, "Karmesin, old cock, in this mob we generally use a .25 automatic with steel-jacket bullets—but you're a big fellow, so I'm packing a 9-millimeter Luger."

I replied, "I never carry arms, but if you frighten me to death you will lose your means of transportation. In short, tell it to the Marines, and be ready for the train."

He was worried, and said, "Dog doesn't eat dog."

"There are dogs and dogs," I said.

Please allow me a little psychology: It is not much I ask of life—a little philosophy, a little psychology, with, perhaps, a shot of metaphysics and a dash of bitters that one acquires? I say that this Carfax, the most astute criminal in England, was easier to rob than a baby. Try taking a lollipop from a baby, and it will cry to high heaven: here is holy innocence. Carfax was neither holy nor innocent, so he did not dare to cry.

Also, by the same token, give a child a pistol and he will, bless him, in all innocence, shoot you. So will Carfax—only he must first manufacture an alibi and get you alone in a lonely room and worry about dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

posing of your remains. Too much detail is tedious—I say, simply, that taking his ill-acquired fortune from the master thief Carfax was far easier than taking a lollipop from a child, as I did once when the child was trying to swallow the stick—and, believe me, it is easier to rob a bank, and a great deal less messy. To cut it fine, I used a child's trick on this over-subtle mastermind.

We got out to the airfield, if I may so call it, where I had Landry set up that airplane. Rest assured that Carfax was at my elbow and his goons were not far behind. They carried the bullion to the extent of about, in troy weight, seven hundred pounds.

Flight Lieutenant Landry was at the controls in a blue cap, and an electric sign flashed on saying: *NO SMOKING. PLEASE ADJUST YOUR SAFETY BELT.* The doors were slammed, the engines turned over, and then the fun began . . .

I suppose you know that you can take just about three minutes of one of these trick airplanes? Try it, I suggest, for two and a half hours, with this piece of engineering performing every known gyration to the thirty-two points of the compass.

I was there for psychological effect. From time to time I shouted, "It looks like we are going into the drink!" At which signal Landry would do a mock nose-dive, a tail-spin, and a sort of belly-roll. The plight of Carfax and Co. was something pitiful to see. From time to time I bellowed warnings about blowing up 'Mae Wests' because we were already in the drink.

Carfax, battered head to toe, begged for mercy after a couple of hours. At a signal from me we looped-the-loop a few more times, bumped in the most sickening manner, then steadied ourselves. Eventually, bump-bump-bump we landed—only, you see, we had never left the ground.

Then we staggered to the prefabricated hut which I had personally adorned inside with French travel posters, a bottle of Armagnac, a copy of *Le Rire*, and a few more artistic touches.

Well, I have never seen a sorrier handful of criminals than Carfax and his boys when they got out of what was once a plane. I said, "Powerful car here. Put the bullion in the boot." So, very unsteadily, they did.

Then I said, "Now, Carfax, I'll trouble you for that canvas belt around your waist. Don't try and pull one of your little guns, because my friends and I carry things of larger caliber. Furthermore, you could not hit the side of a barn at ten feet, so be sensible. Unbuckle, Carfax, and if you pull out the wrong thing, one of us will let you have it in the stomach—which, I believe, is sufficiently empty after your little trip to have room for a few grams of lead. Your boy friends, also, are reeling in circles, while we are steady as stones. Will you have the goodness to unbuckle your belt? Or shall one of my friends be your *valet-de-chambre*?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carfax said, "Karmesin, I'll get you for this!" But he let fall a canvas belt about twelve inches wide. Landry picked it up and handed it to me—I had to drape it around my shoulders, Carfax was such a big man. Suddenly he whimpered, quite demoralized, "How do we get back to England?"

"You have your passports and some money in your pockets," I said. "Everything else failing, go to the Consulate General and weep. Now, if you take the road straight ahead, bear left, hit the main road for about eight miles, you will find yourself at a perfectly respectable railway station."

"You promised—"

"I promised to land you on British soil," I said, "and so I have. You are equidistant between Bedford and Northampton."

Carfax said in a broken voice, "Karmesin, I'll split fifty-fifty."

I replied, "What kind of fool do you take me for, when I have the whole lot?"

So, while Cheerful Charlie drove the machine back to the Fun Fair on the tractor, Landry drove me at high speed back to London.

On the way I told him: "Apart from what you get, remember that there is a moral in this: a child would not have fallen for this trick, but that corrupt creature did. It was child's play—which leads me to conclude that, tough as they think they are, a little child can lead them."

"Oh, well," said Karmesin, "the proceeds, as I told you, amounted to two million, five hundred and thirty thousand, seven hundred pounds—we will ignore the odd shillings. Every penny of this I gave to the Rehabilitation Fund of Free Europe, deducting for myself only twenty per cent plus out-of-pocket expenses. For my work in this matter I charged nothing.

"And that is why your famous Carfax is now reduced to an endowment policy which, to him, is abject poverty. True, he owns the freehold of his home in Highgate; but he is reduced to the level of a petty *rentier*, and the cost of living being what it is, he is a poor man."

Then Karmesin, if not the greatest criminal, at least the greatest and most plausible liar, of his time—perhaps of all time—said, "Carfax has no influence any more, even among those who used to worship him. And upon what did this 'worship' depend? Upon the fact that Carfax was safe, that he was rich. It is not for me to moralize, but Riches and Respect go together . . ."

Grinding out a twice-rolled butt under the heel of a well-worn shoe, he said, "Do you happen to have a fresh cigarette about you—just one?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an ELLERY QUEEN short novel

—complete!

How Ellery, on one of his visits to Wrightsville, met Foster Benedict, whose face had once been called the handsomest in the American theater—the great Foster Benedict himself, famous as the Don Juan of Broadway, Hollywood, and finally, at the sunset of his sensational career, of the summer stock companies and repertory playhouses in the "sticks" . . . and it was this meeting that inevitably led to a classic murder case as difficult as Ellery had ever come to grips with . . .

In his BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR, *editor and critic Anthony Boucher selected "The Death of Don Juan" as the best detective short novel of 1962—a "prime specimen of the true whodunit, complete with baffling clues and faultless amateur detection" . . . "fine grand manner vintage Queen."*

THE DEATH OF DON JUAN

by ELLERY QUEEN

ACT I. Scene 1.

AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH of Don Juan Tenorio, 14th century Spanish libertine—who, according to his valet, enjoyed the embraces of no fewer than 2,954 mistresses during his lifetime—relates that the great lover was murdered in a monastery by Franciscan monks enraged by his virility. For four hundred years poets and dramatists have passed up this ending to Don Juan's mighty career as too unimaginative. No such charge can be brought against *their* versions.

Don Juan, they tell us, planted the seeds of his own destruction when he harrowed the virtue of a certain noble young lady, daughter of the commander of Sevilla. While this sort of thing was no novelty to the famous gallant, it was to the young lady; and Don Juan found himself fighting a duel with her father, the commander, whom he killed.

Here the poetic imagination soars. Don Juan visits the tomb of the late victim of his sword. A marble statue of the grandee decorates the tomb. Don Juan invites the statue to a feast, an inexplicable gesture under

Copyright 1962 by Ellery Queen; originally published in "Argosy"; reprinted by permission of the author

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the circumstances. Having failed in the flesh, the ensculptured nobleman leaps at this second chance to avenge his daughter's ruptured honor. The marble guest shows up at the feast, grasps the roué in his stony clutch, and drags him off to hell. Curtain.

This Don Juan changeling counts among its affectionate foster-parents Molière, Mozart's librettist Da Ponte, Dumas *père*, Balzac, Byron, and Shaw. Now to the roster must be added the modest name of Ellery Queen, who has fathered his own. According to Ellery, Don Juan was really murdered in a New England town named Wrightsville, and this is how it came about.

From the days of William S. Hart and Wallace Reid, Wrightsville's dramatic appetite was catered to by the Bijou Theater in High Village. When in the course of human events the movies' fat years turned lean, the Bijou's owner bought up the old scrap-iron dump on Route 478 and on the site built Wright County's first alfresco movie theater, a drive-in that supplanted Pine Grove in the Junction as the favorite smooching place of the young in heart.

This left the two-by-fours nailed over the doors of the abandoned Bijou; and the chairman of the Wrightsville Realty Board, whose office faced the empty building from the other side of Lower Main, vowed at a Board lunch over his fourth old-fashioned that one dark night he was going to sneak over to that eyesore on the fair face of High Village and blow the damn thing up, he was so sick of looking at it.

When, suddenly, Stanley Bluefield bought it.

Stanley Bluefield was a rare specimen in the Wrightsville zoo. Where the young of the first families grew up to work with their money, Stanley played with it. Seven generations of Bluefields had labored and schemed so that Stanley's life might be one grand game.

As Stanley often said, his vocation was hobbies. He collected such unexpected things as chastity belts, Minié balls, and shrunken heads. He financed one expedition to prove the historicity of Atlantis and another to unearth the bones of Homer. He flitted from Yoga to Zen to voodoo, and then came back to the Congregational church. And the old Bluefield mansion on the Hill was usually infested with freeloaders no one in Wrightsville had ever laid eyes on—"my people collection," he called them.

Stanley Bluefield looked like a rabbit about to drop its first litter. But there was a sweet, stubborn innocence in the portly little bachelor that some weedy souls of the region found appealing.

Stanley bought the Bijou because he discovered The Theater. To prepare himself, he lived for two years in New York studying drama, after which he financed a play and watched the professionals spend his money in a lost but educational

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause. He hurried home to organize an amateur company.

"No, indeed, no red barns surrounded by hollyhocks for me," he told the *Wrightsville Record* reporter. "My plan is to establish a permanent repertory theater, a year-round project to be staffed by local talent."

"This area hasn't supported professional companies in years, Mr. Bluefield," the reporter said. "What makes you think it will support an amateur one?"

One of the little man's pinkish eyes winked. "You wait and see."

Stanley's secret weapon was Joan Truslow. Joanie was what the boys at the Lions and the Red Men luncheons called "a real stacked little gopher," with natural ash-blonde hair and enormous spring-violet eyes. She had been majoring in drama at Merrimac U. when the arthritis got her father and 'Aphas was forced to resign as town clerk. Joan had had to come home and take a job as receptionist at The Eternal Rest Mortuary on Upper Whistling. She was the first to answer Stanley's call, and her audition awed him.

"*Wonderful*," he had confided to Roger Fowler. "That girl will make us all *proud*."

Rodge was not comforted. A chemical engineer, he had used his cut of Great-uncle Fowler's pie to buy one of the blackened brick plants standing idle along the Willow River in Low Village and convert it to Fowler Chemicals, Inc. His interest in Stanley Bluefield's Playhouse was strictly hormonal; he had been chasing Joan Truslow since their high-school days.

To keep an eye on her, young Fowler had offered his services to Stanley, who was not one to look a gift horse under the crupper. The Playhouse needed a technician-in-charge to be responsible for carpentry, props, lights, and other dreary indispensables. So long as the backstage crew functioned, Stanley did not care how many opportunities Roger seized to corner the stage-struck Miss Truslow and, *sotto voce*, *con amore*, try to sell her a bill of household goods.

Stanley did the Bijou over, inside and out, and renamed it The Playhouse. It cost him a fortune, and of course Emmeline DuPré's was the first voice of doom. (Miss DuPré, known to the cruder element as the Town Crier, taught Dancing and Dramatics to the children of the already *haut monde* of Wrightsville.)

"Stanley will never see a penny of his unearned lucre," Miss DuPré announced.

For once the Town Crier seemed to cry true. The Playhouse was a resounding flop, Joanie Truslow notwithstanding. Stanley tried Shaw, Kaufman and Hart, Tennessee Williams, even (these were conceived in desperation and born calamities) Ionesco and Anouilh; comedy, farce, melodrama, tragedy; the square and the off-beat. They continued to play to dwindling houses.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course, we're not very *good* yet," Stanley reflected aloud after a lethal week.

"Joan's colossal, and you know it," Rodge Fowler said in spite of himself.

"Thank you, sir." Joan's dimple drove him crazy. "I thought you were against careers for females."

"Who's against careers for females? I'm just against a career for you," Roger said, hating himself for driving the dimple to cover. "Look, Stan, how much more of your ancestral dough are you prepared to drop into this cultural tomb we call home?"

Stanley said in his precise, immovable way, "I am *not* giving up yet, Roger."

A *Record* editorial said: "Is local taste so low that our favorite amusements must be TV Westerns and dramatized deodorant commercials, and movies that give our children the willies? At a time when Wrightsville is reflecting the nation-wide jump in juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, dope addiction, gambling, and what have you, the community should be supporting Mr. Bluefield's efforts to bring us worthwhile dramatic fare. Why not attend The Playhouse regularly, and bring along your teen-agers?"

The empty seats kept spreading like a rash.

A letter to the *Record* signed Cassandra, in a literary style indistinguishable from Emmeline DuPré's, suggested that the Wrightsville Playhouse be renamed The Haunted Playhouse.

When the town's snickers reached the Hill, Stanley's pink eyes turned a murderous red. Very few people in Wrightsville were aware of the paper thinness of Stanley Bluefield's skin.

He flung himself into the Viking throne in his catch-all study, and he thought and he thought.

All at once the name of Archer Dullman flew into his head.

Ten minutes later Wrightsville's patron of the performing arts was driving lickety-hop for the airport and the next plane connection to New York.

ACT I. Scene 2.

Ellery checked in at the Hollis, showered and changed, cased the lobby, toured the Square (which was round), and returned to the hotel without having seen a single familiar face.

He was waiting for the maitre d' (also new to him) in a queue of strangers at the entrance to the main dining room, thinking that time was being its usual unkind self, when a voice behind him said, "Mr. Queen, I presume?"

"Roger!" Ellery wrung young Fowler's hand like Dr. Livingstone at Ujiji. The truth was, he had met Rodge Fowler less than half a dozen times during his various visits to Wrightsville. "How are you? What's happened to this town?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm fine, and it's still here with certain modifications," Roger said, blowing on his hand. "What brings you this-a-way?"

"I'm bound for the Mahoganies—vacation. I hear you're Wrightsville's latest outbreak of industrial genius."

"That's what they tell me, but who told you?"

"I'm a *Record* mail-subscriber from 'way back. How come you've joined a drama group, Rodge? I thought you got your kicks in a chem lab."

"Love," Roger said hollowly. "Or whatever they're calling it these days."

"Of course. Joan Truslow. But isn't the company folding? That ought to drop Joanie back into your lap."

Roger looked glum. "*The Death of Don Juan.*"

"That old stand of corn? Even Wrightsville—"

"You're not getting the message, man. Starring Mark Manson. Complete with doublet, hose, and codpiece. We open tomorrow night."

"Manson." Ellery stared. "Who dug him up?"

"Stanley Bluefield, via some Times Square undertaker named Archer Dullman. Manson's a pretty lively corpse, Ellery. We're sold out for the run."

"So the old boy still packs them in in Squedunk," Ellery said admiringly. "*The Death of Don Juan* . . . This I've got to see."

"There's Stanley at that corner table, with Manson and Dullman. I'm meeting them for dinner. Why not join us?"

Ellery had forgotten how much like a happy rabbit Stanley Bluefield looked. "I'm *delighted* you're here for the opening," Stanley cried. "You will be, Ellery, won't you?"

"If I have to hang from a rafter. I haven't had the pleasure of attending one of Mr. Manson's performances in—" Ellery had been about to say "in a great many years," but he changed it to "in some time."

"How are things at the Embassy, Mr. Green?" the actor asked sadly, tilting his cocktail glass, finding it empty, running his forefinger around the inside of the glass, and licking the finger. "You should have seen me with Booth, sir. John Wilkes, that is. Those were the days. *Garçonne*, may I trouble you for an encore?"

The wavering finger pushed the empty glass into alignment with nine others, whereupon Manson smiled at Ellery and fell asleep. Head thrown back, he resembled a mummy; his gentle, fine-boned face was overlaid with a mesh of wrinkles.

The waitress took their orders. Manson woke up, courteously ordered *Chaud-Froid de Cailles en Belle Vue*, and fell asleep again.

"What's that?" the waitress demanded.

"Never mind, honey. Bring him a rare T-bone."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stanley looked peevish. "I do hope—"

"Don't worry, Bluefield. He never misses a curtain."

Ellery turned, surprised. The speaker was the man introduced to him as Archer Dullman. He had immediately forgotten Dullman was there. He now saw why. Dullman was not large and not small, neither fat nor thin, ruddy nor pale. Hair, eyes, voice were neutral. It was hard to imagine him excited, angry, amorous, or drunk. Ellery paid close attention to him after that.

"Are you Mr. Manson's manager, Mr. Dullman?"

"It's a buck."

Even so, it was some time before he realized that Dullman had not actually answered his question.

Ellery buttered a roll. "By the way, isn't it an Actors' Equity rule that its members may not perform with amateurs?"

It was Stanley who answered; in rather a hurry, Ellery thought. "Oh, but you can almost always get Equity's permission in special cases. Where no Equity company is playing the area, and provided the amateur group initiates the request, deposits the full amount of the member's salary with them, and so forth. Ah, the soup!" He greeted the return of their waitress with relief. "Best chowder in town. Right, Minnie?"

Ellery wondered what was bugging the little man. Then he remembered.

The "Archer" had fooled him. Around Broadway, Dullman was always called "The Dull Man." It was a typical Broadway quip; Dullman was supposed to be sharper than a columnist's tooth. If Stanley Bluefield had allowed himself to be sucked into a typical Dullman deal . . .

"They've been calling us The Haunted Playhouse and laughing their heads off," Stanley was chortling. "Who's laughing now?"

"Not me," Rodge Fowler growled. "That scene on the couch between Manson and Joan in the first act is an absolute disgrace."

"How would you expect Don Juan to act on a couch?" Dullman asked with a smile.

"You didn't have to direct it that way, Dullman!"

"Oh, you're directing?" Ellery murmured. But nobody heard him.

"Think of the dear old ladies, Fowler."

"I'm thinking of Joan!"

"Now, Rodge," Stanley said.

Manson chose that moment to wake up. He peered around the crowded dining room and staggered to his feet. His hairpiece had come loose and slipped to one side, exposing a hemisphere of dead-white scalp. He stood there like some aged Caesar in his cups, bowing to his people.

"My dear, dear friends," the actor said; and then, with simple confidence, he slid into Dullman's arms.

Stanley and Roger were half out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of their chairs. But Ellery was already supporting the actor's other side.

"Manson can walk, Dullman. Just give him some support."

Between them they dragged Manson, graciously smiling, from the dining room. The lobby seethed with people attending a Ladies' Aid ball; a great many were waiting for the elevators.

"We can't maneuver him through that mob, Dullman. What floor is he on?"

"Second."

"Then let's walk him up. Manson, lift your feet. That's it. You're doing nobly."

Ellery and Dullman hustled him up the staircase toward the mezzanine. Dullman was crooning in the actor's ear, "No more martinis, huh, Mark? So tomorrow night you can step out on that stage in those sexy tights of yours and give these Yokelsville ladies a thrill. You're the great Mark Manson, remember?" Manson made small pleased noises.

Stanley and Roger came running up behind them.

"How is he?" Stanley panted.

"Beginning to feel pain, I think," Ellery said. "How about it, Manson?"

"My dear sir," the actor said indulgently. "Anyone would think I am intoxicated. Really, this is undignified and unnecessary."

He achieved the mezzanine landing and paused there to recuperate. Ellery glanced at Dullman, and Dullman nodded. They released him.

Ellery grabbed in vain. "*Catch him!*"

But both Stanley and Roger stood there, stunned. Manson, still smiling, toppled backward between them.

Fascinated, they watched the star of *The Death of Don Juan* bounce his way step after step down the long marble staircase until he landed on the lobby floor and lay still.

ACT I. Scene 3.

They went straight from the hospital to Dullman's room at the Hollis. Dullman sat down at the telephone.

"Long distance? New York City. I want to speak to Phil Stone, theatrical agent, West Forty-fourth Street. No, I'll hold on."

"Stone." Stanley was hopping about the room. "I don't know him, Archer."

"So you don't know him," the New Yorker grunted. "Phil? Arch Dullman."

"So what do you want?" Ellery could hear Stone's bass rasp distinctly.

"Philly boy," Dullman said.

"Please, Archie, no routines. It's been an itch of a day, and I was just going home. What's on your mind?"

"Phil, I'm on a spot up here—"

"Up where?"

"Wrightsville. New England."

"Never heard. Can't be a show

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

town. What are you, in a new racket?"

"There's a stock company here just getting started. I made a deal for Mark Manson with this producer to do *The Death of Don Juan.*"

"What producer?"

"Stanley Bluefield. Opening's romorrow night. Tonight Manson falls down a staircase in the hotel and breaks the wrist and a couple fingers of his right hand, besides cracking two ribs."

"Old lushes never die. That's all?"

"It's plenty. There might even be concussion. They're keeping him in the hospital twenty-four hours just in case."

"So what?" The agent sounded remote.

"The thing is, they've taped his ribs and put a cast on his forearm and hand. He won't be able to work for weeks." A drop of perspiration coursed down Dullman's nose and landed on the butt of his cigar. "Phil—how about Foster Benedict?"

Stone's guffaw rattled the telephone.

"Foster Benedict?" Stanley Bluefield looked astounded. He leaped to Dullman's free ear. "You get him, Archer!"

But Ellery was watching Rodge Fowler. At the sound of Benedict's name Roger had gripped the arms of his chair as if a nerve had been jabbed.

Dullman paid no attention to Stanley. "Well, you hyena?"

Stone's voice said dryly, "Might I be so stupid as to ask if this Bluefield and his company are pros?"

Arch Dullman spat his cigar butt, a thing of shining shreds, onto the carpet. "It's an amateur group."

"Look, crook," the agent boomed. "This backwoods Sam Harris wants a replacement for Manson, he's got to contact me, not you. He's got to satisfy Equity, not you. You still there, Archie?"

"I'm still here," Dullman sighed. "Here's Bluefield."

Stanley was at the phone in a flash. Dullman picked up the butt and put it back in his mouth. He remained near the phone.

"Stanley Bluefield here," Stanley said nervously. "Do I understand, Mr. Stone, that Foster Benedict is available for a two-week engagement in *The Death of Don Juan,* to start tomorrow night?"

"Mr. Benedict's resting between engagements. I don't know if I could talk him into going right back to work."

"How well does he know the part?"

"Foster's done that turkey so many times he quacks. That's another reason it might not interest him. He's sick of it."

"How much," Stanley asked, not without humor, "will it take to cure him?"

Stone said carelessly, "Fifteen hundred a week might do it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Give me that phone," Dullman said. "Who do you think you're dealing with, Phil? Benedict's washed up in Hollywood, dead on Broadway, and TV's had a bellyful of him. I happen to know he's flat on his tokus. I wouldn't let Mr. Bluefield touch him with a skunk pole if Manson's accident hadn't left us over this barrel. Seven fifty, Phil, take it or leave it. You taking or leaving?"

After ten seconds the agent said, "I'll call you back." Dullman gave him the numbers of the Hollis phone and his extension and hung up.

"He'll take." Dullman lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

Stanley began to hop around the room again.

"You're asking for it," Roger Fowler said tightly. "Benedict's a bad actor, Stan. And I'm not referring to his professional competence."

"*Please*, Roger," the little man said testily. "Don't I have enough on my mind?"

Twelve minutes later the telephone rang. From the bed Dullman said, "You can take it."

"Yes?" Stanley cried.

"We're taking," Stone's bass said. "But you understand, Mr. Bluefield, you got to clear this deal with Equity yourself before we lift a hoof."

"Yes, yes. First thing in the morning."

"I'll be waiting for Equity's go-ahead. Soon as I get it, Benedict's on his way."

"Hold it," Dullman said.

"Hold it," Stanley said.

Dullman got wearily off the bed, whispered something, and returned to the bed.

Stanley pursed his lips. "According to my information, Mr. Stone, Benedict might start out tomorrow for Wrightsville and wind up in a Montreal hotel room with some girl he picked up en route. Can you guarantee delivery?"

"What's that sucker Dullman want, my blood? I'll put him on the plane. That's the best I can do."

Stanley glanced anxiously at Dullman. Dullman shrugged.

"Well, all right, but please impress on Mr. Benedict . . ."

"Yeah, yeah."

"He'll have to change planes in Boston, by the way. There's no through flight. I'll have a car waiting at Wrightsville Airport. If he makes an early enough connection we ought to be able to get in a quick run-through."

"That's up to Equity. Like I said, he ain't moving a muscle—"

"Leave Equity to me. You just get Benedict here."

"Up in his lines," Dullman said.

"Up in his lines," Stanley said, and he hung up. "Archer, that was an inspiration!" Dullman grunted. "Roger, would you run across the Square and ask the *Record* to hold the press? I'll phone them the new copy for tomorrow's ad in a few minutes."

"You're dead set on going ahead

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with this?" Roger said, not moving.

"Now, Rodge," Stanley said.

Dullman began to snore.

Ellery thought the whole performance extraordinary.

ACT I. Scene 4.

Ellery made his way around the Square and into Lower Main under a filthy sky.

It had been an exasperating day for Stanley Bluefield. The little man had been on the long distance phone with Equity since early morning. By the time the details were straightened out to Equity's satisfaction, and Foster Benedict was airborne to Boston, the actor was on a schedule so tight that he could not hope to set down in Wrightsville before 7:55 p.m. This would give Benedict barely enough time to make up, get into costume, and dash onstage for the 8:30 curtain.

Ellery walked into the lobby of the rejuvenated Bijou, pushed through one of the new black patent-leatherette doors, and entered Stanley Bluefield's Playhouse.

The elegantly done-over interior lay under a heavy hush. The cast, already made up and in costume, were sitting about the nakedly lit first-act set either sipping from coffee containers that might have been poisoned or staring into the gloom of the theater in emotional rapport. A pretty blonde girl he recognized as Joan Truslow was stretched out tensely on the set couch where, Ellery surmised, Don Juan Benedict was shortly to seduce her in the service of art. Roger Fowler, in coveralls, was stroking her temples.

Ellery slipped down the last aisle on his right and through the stage door. He found himself in a cramped triangle of space, the stage to his left. To his right a single door displayed a painted star and a placard hastily lettered *MR. BENEDICT*. A narrow iron ladder led to a tiny railed landing above and to another dressing room.

Curious, Ellery opened the starred door and looked in. Stanley had outdone himself here. Brilliant lighting switched on in the windowless room at the opening of the door. Air conditioning hummed softly. The driftwood-paneled walls were hung with theatrical prints. Costumes lay thrown about and the handsome trimirrored dressing table was a clutter of wigs, hand props, and pots and boxes of theatrical make-up, evidently as Manson had left them before his accident.

Impressed, Ellery backed out. He edged around an open metal chest marked *Tools* and made his way behind the upstage flat to the other side of the theater. Here there was ample space for the property room, the stage entrance, the lighting board, and a spiral of iron steps leading up to half a dozen additional dressing rooms. Beneath them, at stage level, a door announced *Mr. Butterfield. Keep Out.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery knocked.

Stanley's voice screamed, "I said *nobody!*"

"It's Ellery Queen."

"Oh. Come in."

The office was a little symphony in stainless steel. Stanley sat at his desk, left elbow anchored to the blotter, left fist supporting his cheek, eyes fixed on the telephone. All Ellery could think of was Napoleon after the Battle of Waterloo contemplating what might have been.

Arch Dullman stood at the one window, chewing on a dead cigar. He did not turn around.

Ellery dropped into a chair. "Storm trouble?"

The bunny-nose twitched. "Benedict phoned from the airfield in Boston. All planes grounded."

The window lit up as if an atom bomb had gone off. Dullman jumped back and Stanley shot to his feet. A crash jarred the theatrical photographs on the walls out of alignment. Immediately the heavens opened and the alley below the window became a river.

"This whole damn production is jinxed," Dullman said, glancing at his watch. "They'll be starting to come in soon, Bluefield. We'll have to postpone."

"And give them another chance to laugh at me?" The little Bluefield jaw enlarged. "We're holding that curtain."

"How long do you think we can hold it? Benedict's plane mightn't be able to take off for hours."

"The storm is traveling northwestward, Archer. Boston should clear any minute. It's only a half-hour's flight."

Dullman went out. Ellery heard him order the house lights switched on and the curtain closed. He did not come back.

The phone came to life at 8:25. Stanley pounced on it. "What did I tell you? He's taking off!"

Foster Benedict got to the The Playhouse at eighteen minutes past nine. The rain had stopped, but the alley leading to the stage entrance was dotted with puddles and the actor had to hop and sidestep to avoid them. From his scowl, he took the puddles as a personal affront. Stanley and Dullman hopped and sidestepped along with him, both talking at once.

The company waiting expectantly in the stage entrance pressed back as Benedict approached. He strode past them without a glance, leaving an aroma of whiskey and eau de cologne behind him. If he was drunk, Ellery could detect no evidence of it.

Rodge Fowler was stern-jawed. And Joan Truslow, Ellery noticed, looked as if she had just been struck in the face.

Foster Benedict glanced about. "You—Mr. Bluefish, is it? Where's my dressing room?"

"At the other side of the stage, Mr. Benedict," Stanley puffed. "But there's no time—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They've been sitting out there for over an hour," Dullman said. The booing and stamping of the audience had been audible in the alley.

"Ah." The actor seated himself in the stage doorman's chair. "The voice of Wrightsburg."

"Wrights*ville*," Stanley said. "Mr. Benedict, really—"

"And these, I gather," Benedict said, inspecting the silent cast, "are the so-called actors in this misbegotten exercise in theatrical folly?"

"Mr. Benedict," Stanley said again, "*please!*"

Ellery had not seen Benedict for a long time. The face that had once been called the handsomest in the American theater looked like overhandled dough. Sacs bulged under the malicious eyes. The once taut throat was beginning to string. Only the rich and supple voice was the same.

"The little lady there," the actor said, his stare settling on Joan. "An orchid in the vegetable patch. What does she play, Dullman? The heroine, I hope."

"Yes, yes," Dullman said. "But there's no time for introductions or anything, Benedict. You'll have to go on as you are for the first act—"

"My make-up box, Phil." Benedict extended his arm and snapped his fingers, his eyes still on Joan. Her face was chalky. Ellery glanced at Roger's hands. They were fists.

"Phil Stone isn't here," Dullman said. "Remember?"

"Oh, hell, I forgot my make-up. But does it really matter?"

"There's no time to make up, either! Manson's stuff is still in the star dressing room and you can use his when you dress between acts. Look, are you going on or aren't you?"

"Mr. Benedict." Stanley was trembling. "I give you precisely thirty seconds to get out on that stage and take your position for the curtain. Or I prefer charges to Equity."

The actor rose, smiling. "If I recall the stage business, dear heart, and believe me I do," he said to Joan, "we'll have an enchanting opportunity to become better acquainted during the first act. Then perhaps a little champagne supper after the performance? All *right*, Bluefish!" he said crossly. "Just as I am, eh?" He shrugged. "Well, I've played the idiotic role every other way. It may be amusing at that."

He stalked onstage.

"Places!" Dullman bellowed. Joan drifted away like a ghost in shock. The rest of the cast scurried. "Fowler, Fowler?"

Roger came to life.

"Where's that lights man of yours? Get with it, will you?" As Roger walked away, Dullman froze. "Is-that Benedict out there making a *speech?*"

"In the too, too solid flesh," Ellery said with awe, peeping from the wings. Benedict had stepped out on the apron and he was explaining with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

comical gestures and facial contortions why "this distinguished Wrongsville audience" was about to see the great Foster Benedict perform Act One of *The Death of Don Juan* — "the biggest egg ever laid by a turkey"—in street clothes and *sans* make-up. The audience was beginning to titter and clap.

Ellery turned at a gurgle behind him. Stanley's nose was twitching again.

"What is he *doing?* Who does he think he *is?*"

"Barrymore in *My Dear Children*, I guess." Dullman was chewing away on his cigar. He seemed fascinated.

They could only watch helplessly while Benedict played the buffoon. His exit was a triumph of extemporization. He bowed gravely, assumed a ballet stance, and then, like Nijinsky in *The Spectre of the Rose*, he took off in a mighty leap for the wings.

ACT I. Scene 5.

Ellery, jammed in with Stanley Bluefield among the standees at the rear of the theater, watched the first act in total disbelief.

Benedict deliberately paraphrased speech after speech. The bewildered amateurs waiting for their cues forgot their lines. Then he would throw the correct cue, winking over the footlights. He capered, struck attitudes, invented business, addressed broad asides to the hilarious audience. He transformed the old melodrama into a slapstick farce.

Ellery glanced down at Stanley. What he saw made him murmur hastily, "He's doing far more damage to himself than to you."

But Stanley said, "It's me they're howling at," in a pink-eyed fury, and he groped his way through the lobby doors and disappeared.

The seduction scene was an interminable embarrassment. Once during the scene, in sheer self-defense, Joan did something that made Benedict yelp. But he immediately tossed an ad lib to the audience that Ellery did not catch, and in the ensuing shriek of laughter returned to the attack.

At the scene's conclusion Joan stumbled off the stage like a sleepwalker.

Ellery found that he was grinding his teeth.

The curtain came down at last. Ushers opened the fire exit doors at both sides of the theater. People, wiping their eyes, pushed into the alleys. Ellery wriggled through the lobby to the street and lit a bitter-tasting cigarette. Long after the warning buzzer sounded, he lingered on the sidewalk.

Finally, he went back in.

The house lights were still on. Surprised, Ellery glanced at his watch. Probably Benedict needed extra time to get into costume and make up for the second act. Or perhaps—the thought pleased him—Roger had punched him in the nose.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The house lights remained on. The audience began to shuffle, murmur, cough.

Ellery edged through the standees to the extreme left aisle and made for the stage door. It was deathly quiet backstage.

Stanley Bluefield's door was open, and Arch Dullman was stamping up and down the office in a cloud of angry smoke. He seized Ellery.

"Seen Bluefield anywhere?"

"No," Ellery said. "What's wrong?"

"I don't give a damn who Benedict thinks he is," Dullman said. "Even a sucker like Butterfield deserves a better shake. First that moldy hunk of ham turns the first act into a low-comedy vaudeville bit, now he won't answer his call! Queen, do me a favor and get him out of there."

"Why me?"

"I don't trust myself. What's more, you tell him for me that if he doesn't play the rest of this show straight I'll personally bust that balloon he calls a head!"

Ellery's built-in alarm was jangling for all it was worth. "You'd better come with me."

They hurried behind the upstage flat to the other side of the theater. Ellery rapped on the starred door. He rapped again. "Mr. Benedict?"

There was no answer.

"Mr. Benedict, you're holding up the curtain."

Silence.

"Benedict?"

Ellery opened the door.

Foster Benedict, his back to the door, was in the chair at the dressing table, half lying among the wigs and make-up boxes.

He was partly dressed in a Don Juan costume. The shirt was of flowing white silk and just below the left shoulder blade, from the apex of a wet red ragged stain, the handle of a knife protruded.

(*Continued on page 57*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HARRY SYLVESTER**

TITLE: ***Instruments of Violence***

TYPE: Crime and Detection

LOCALE: Western United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Luke was a member of the Gold Creek Sheriff's Posse—a kind of "honorary" organization complete with gold badges and white Stetsons; but his fiancée was troubled without knowing exactly why.*

IN HIS APARTMENT, WHICH WOULD be just big enough after he married Ellen, Luke changed clothes and, out of habit, looked again at the gleaming badge and then at the tarnished gold bars. The day was a half holiday for the state because a new governor was being inaugurated, and banks and offices had closed at noon. After dressing, Luke would go for a late lunch at the penthouse in the city's skyscraper, where the Gold Creek sheriff's posse was meeting—ostensibly for business purposes, but actually to mourn the defeat of the former governor, whom most of the posse had admired.

In the half light of his closet, the badge on the gray silk gabardine shirt gleamed brighter than the bars on his old Army officer's uniform. Luke had noticed this difference before, and for the past few weeks it had troubled him. The second lieutenant's bars stood for an experience, while the badge—though it was the authentic deputy sheriff's badge of Talisman County—stood only for some friends and acquaintances of his who dressed in tailor-made ranch clothes and maintained elaborate clubrooms in a penthouse on top of a skyscraper.

Ellen had not wanted him to join the Gold Creek sheriff's posse. She had difficulty saying just what it was that troubled her about the group—something about the instruments of violence being in the hands of men who generally were not trained for

Copyright 1955 by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company; originally titled "Tin-Star Posse"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

violence, or by character suited to it. But Luke had joined because, as the older members reminded him, his grandfather had been a founder of the city of Lodray.

Also, Luke was a friend of Elwood Brady, who owned a hardware store and was a veteran of World War II, as Luke was of Korea; and Brady was as much a leader as the posse had in the city. Actually, its members were the deputies of Frank Sizemore, the aging sheriff of Talisman County. That some of the posse had never even met Sizemore was another detail that troubled Ellen.

Driving to the clubrooms in his car, Luke recalled almost idly how the posse had come to be formed; it had been just about the time he had left for Korea. In a state given over mostly to cattle and mining, Talisman County was a small green thumb pointing south, touching and just entering the northern edge of the city of Lodray. Perhaps nine-tenths of Lodray was in Lodray County and the remainder in Talisman. This had come about when, shortly after World War I, Lodray's better suburbs spilled over into Talisman County, and the city had reached out to include them.

When this occurred, two men named Joe Bloodgood and Ty Creedon had revived an idea of which they had always been fond. This was to create and maintain a sheriff's posse of respectable citizens. They thought less in terms of aiding the sheriff of Lodray County than of preserving certain vestiges of the Old West. For the sheriff of Lodray County had no need of a posse. His domain lay entirely within the limits of a large and ever more urban city. He and his deputies drove cars, and some of them might not have known how to sit a horse.

When the city limits of Lodray were pushed northward, Luke remembered, Creedon and Bloodgood had worked to form their posse through Louis Foushay, who knew Frank Sizemore. When Foushay had explained to the sheriff how the posse his friend wished to form might dress up such occasions as a visit by the governor, the sheriff had agreed that it might be a nice idea. In time, he swore in a posse he himself had not chosen.

Luke knew that the posse had been wearing white Stetsons with silver bands ever since the first trip north to Talisman City to attend the governor on an inspection tour. Most of the members rode palominos, and they brought their horses in padded trailers attached to twelve-cylinder cars. On the sides of each trailer were neat gold letters: *Gold Creek Sheriff's Posse.*

There had been some early competition as to which member could get the most silver on his saddle, Luke had heard, and since the shirts were as individualistic as expensive tailoring could make them, it was decided that the large white Stetsons would be the identifying mark of the posse. They had gold badges,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but the hats made more of a showing on parade.

Relations between Sheriff Sizemore and his deputies had remained good. Yet, actually, the sheriff's feelings about his distant posse were more complicated than he knew. What had begun as a favor to a neighboring farmer, as the sheriff thought of Louis Foushay, had grown into a club—if one could believe the newspapers—for which Sizemore himself could not have qualified even had he wished.

The sheriff was never sure why at times the very existence of the posse troubled him. He had grown somewhat easier about it, as he had told Luke, when Luke became a member. The sheriff knew Ellen's family and had been amused by some of her remarks about the posse, although Luke had not mentioned Ellen's statement that the members sometimes seemed to prefer their clubrooms to either their horses or their wives.

The governor whom the posse had so many times attended had been unexpectedly defeated in the biyearly election. As a mark of disfavor, the posse had decided not to attend the inauguration of the new governor, although Luke had voted to go . . .

Most of the posse were gathered in the penthouse when Luke arrived on the afternoon of the inauguration. "The way I figure," Ty Creedon said, "we'll have to work that much harder to get us back a governor we can respect." Some of them had begun to realize that they had cut themselves off from much of the activity in which they delighted.

The telephone rang and Martin Thompson, a somewhat overweight young man, went to answer it. He stood silent for some seconds, listening, and in a moment he said loudly, "Yes, this is the Gold Creek posse. But who the hell wants it?"

Since Thompson often spoke that way, the members' talk resumed after a little silence, rose, then ceased abruptly. "The sheriff?" Thompson was saying. "What sheriff?" Half amused, half arrogant, he turned and faced the room. "This is a good one, boys. Some joker says he's the sheriff of Talisman County."

Elwood Brady walked across the room and took the receiver from Thompson's hand. "This is Elwood Brady," he said. "Who is this?"

"This is Frank Sizemore, Brady. Sorry to have to bother you."

"No bother at all, Sheriff." Brady talked with almost mechanical ease, as if the sheriff were a customer calling his hardware store about a defective lawn mower. "No bother at all."

"Something I thought might never happen," Sizemore said. "I'm going to need some of your boys."

Brady felt no alarm, only a certain incomprehension. "What seems to be the trouble, Sheriff?"

"Why, that bank just outside Kaw City was broke into."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But Kaw City is sixty miles northeast, out of your district."

"Yes, but they come down this way."

"Well, what have we got state police for?" Brady felt as if he were speaking for the others listening in the room. "Can't they set up a roadblock?"

"Most of the state police are at the inauguration," the sheriff said. "Corporal Owens is the only one in the county. He set up a one-car roadblock. The car's wrecked, he's hurt, and three of the four boys he was after are loose in the north part of the county. The other one's dead."

Brady listened. The others had gathered about him. Luke could not escape the feeling that Brady spoke for the posse rather than himself. "Well, look," Brady said, "I guess we can send someone up there, but this is unusual."

"No one knows better than I how unusual," Sizemore said.

"You want to hold on a minute? Or can I call you back?"

"I'll hold," the sheriff said. "I'm not at the office. I'm at a country store, and there's about nine other phones on this party line. Sure as I hang up, someone'll use the line and you won't be able to reach me."

Brady lowered the receiver and looked at the group. Louis Foushay said they had no business going up there; the job was one for the state police. Leach Morgan said he was going to go, and who was going with him? Creedon said to call a local paper and find out just how bad the situation really was.

"That's right," Joe Bloodgood said. "I wouldn't trust anyone as old as Sizemore to appraise a situation."

"We can't call a paper," Luke said, "without hanging up on the sheriff. And we have to give him some kind of answer. I think we ought to find out who's going and ask Frank Sizemore what we need to bring, or maybe not bring."

Although he spoke calmly, he found himself nearly as troubled as before his first combat in Korea. He remembered too what Ellen had said about the posse, and he found himself wondering what it might be like to have untried men with him in a crisis.

He remembered how the major had always been concerned that the battalions on each flank be commanded by an experienced man. As a second lieutenant, Luke himself had been less concerned with his company's flanks; yet now, here, some of his old commanding officer's concern arose in him.

The room contained close to twenty men. They did not move very much, but to Luke they seemed to sway in precarious balance, toward laughter and back to a kind of near panic.

Eddie Horton approached Brady and put his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone. "Tell him we'll be up there. Then we can call a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paper and see what it's all about."

But the sheriff was not so easily put off. He wanted to know how many might be coming. He said he didn't think they should bring horses in trailers. The state police had started down from the capital, three hundred miles to the northwest.

Brady told the sheriff that he thought at least a dozen men would go. The sheriff then gave directions; he was at a store by the dirt crossroads north of Talisman City.

When Brady hung up, Horton seized the telephone and called the editor of one of the local dailies. He learned there had been four bandits. They were professionals, for the holdup had been timed for the start of the inaugural. No state police were immediately available; even the police chief of the suburb was at the capital. No one had taken the number of the stolen car but there had been a description of it, and on the strength of that the now-wounded Corporal Owens had set up his roadblock.

The fleeing car had veered to the soft shoulder to pass the police car astride the road. The front wheels had skidded in the moist clay. The moving car had sideswiped the police car, almost turning over, and then righted itself and skidded back across the road, coming to rest in a ditch. During the process it had seemed about to turn over again, and the corporal had made the mistake of showing himself. He had taken a .45 slug in the shoulder. Lying in the road, he had carefully aimed and killed one of the four men as they fled from the ditched car.

When Horton finished retelling the editor's story, Lodray Smith said that Eddie should have told the editor that the posse was heading north to get in on the hunt. For some reason this innocuous remark made the posse members silent.

"What we want to tell the papers for?" Martin Thompson said. "Let them find out if we do anything."

"Anyhow," Elwood Brady said, "we better decide who's going."

"Why, everyone is," Creedon said. "What else?"

"I'm not," Louis Foushay said.

"Why, that's your territory, Louis," Leach Morgan said, "We'll need you for a scout." He laughed.

"It's a waste of time," Foushay said. "They'll lie in that sage until dark, then be gone by morning."

Luke spoke without intending to. "I'm going. I'll have to get my gear. There ought to be an arrangement about how we go."

He thought of calling Ellen and then decided not to, for approximately the same reason Martin Thompson thought the paper should not be told of their plans.

To Luke's surprise, his words produced a kind of babble. Out of it came an arrangement to go car by car rather than to wait and all go together. If they went together they would be committed to the time of the slowest . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elwood Brady rode with Luke. Each carried a revolver, and Luke's rifle lay unloaded on the floor of the car. "I never thought the posse would have to come up here like this," Luke said.

"You'd be surprised at how often I've worried about something like this," Brady said. "Like a dream—knowing it would never happen but wondering about if it should."

Although they drove at just over sixty, they were passed by a heavy car blowing its horn. The emblem of the posse showed on the rear bumper.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Elwood Brady said.

"I know what you mean," Luke said.

"It ain't the ones that'll have an excuse not to come, but the ones coming up like to a picnic," Brady said.

Eight miles beyond Talisman City they found the store at the crossroads. Four cars were parked near it. A small group of men stood near the cars.

"I asked them not to wear those hats," Brady said. Luke saw the white Stetsons on Horton, Bloodgood, and Ty Creedon.

The sheriff nodded to Luke and Brady as they walked toward the group. In his prime, the sheriff had been a large man. His bones still were big, but the wide shoulders drooped and he had lost flesh. His cheeks were hollow and lined. The hawk nose made his wide, drooping shoulders seem like folded, ridiculous wings; and he did not attempt to make the thin smile appear real.

With the group was a stranger to whom the sheriff referred as his son-in-law. This was a young man, perhaps Luke's age, twenty-six, whose ruddy checks and snub nose made him appear even younger. With his flat, black Mormon-style hat and his pistol in a holster, he looked like a serious child playing at guns.

"Many more of your boys coming?" the sheriff asked.

"Oh, quite a few," Horton said. "Brady would know."

"It's a little hard to say, Sheriff," Brady said. "I'd guess maybe a dozen would be here. Not much local help, I see." This was the wrong thing to say, and Brady knew it as soon as he spoke.

Now even the fake smile was gone from the sheriff's face, although the face itself seemed almost kindly.

"Mr. Brady," he said, "the local help has got the impression over the last few years that if there ever was trouble here, you boys from Lodray would take care of it."

"We're here and more of us are coming," Brady said.

Luke felt how thin his own smile was. He found his allegiance divided between the sheriff and the posse.

The sheriff briefed them. As he spoke, Leach Morgan and Martin Thompson, in their tailor-made shirts and Stetsons, arrived in a heavy car with a horse trailer back of it. The road they had come along

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was crowned, so Thompson backed his car into the crossroad. A little rise, thickly covered with sage, cut off the view of one road from the other. Thompson parked about forty yards away from the group.

The sheriff's voice went on. The men they hunted would be lost without a car, he said. They were city people, not used to open country. He thought they feared the sage desert and would not attempt to move far in it. He didn't have enough men to comb that much sage thoroughly, so he would try to confine the fugitives until the state police arrived.

What he wanted was to put a line of men along the roads to the north and east to form a corner, and a third line along the shore of the lake to form a triangle. There weren't enough men, nor likely to be, and maybe some of them could use cars and patrol the two roads slowly. Two local men were already over by the lake.

Thompson wanted to know if he could patrol on horseback. Luke thought: That's Marty wanting to play cowboy again. Although in the sage a horse might be a help in an emergency, the man on it would also be a fine target.

The sheriff's son-in-law faced the road down which Thompson's car was parked. "That car ain't got its brakes locked," he said, and his voice rose slightly. "It's drifting forward."

"And it's come unhitched from the trailer, too," Thompson said. He began to trot easily toward his car. As it rolled, the car also turned, but then the watchers were distracted by Thompson stumbling and sprawling on the road. It was only after this—after watching the rolling car begin to veer and watching Thompson fall—that most of them heard the noise—two noises that were almost one—and began to relate the noise to the man stumbling.

Someone had shot Thompson.

The moving car continued across the road, for a moment broadside to the watchers. Then it began to back. The sheriff shot first and then Luke, without thinking. He shot at a tire, and with his second or third shot he saw the tire go flat. He was on one knee, behind what cover a hitching post offered. He did not remember how he got there.

By now the car had turned toward them. The sheriff and those near him had taken cover, most of them simply by lying on the ground. Only Leach Morgan still stood.

"They killed Marty," he said over and over while he fired his silver-handled pistol at the turning car. Others fired too, including the men in the car, and Morgan fell backward to the ground, his pistol hand flung wide in an oratorical gesture. He lay there, his pale-blue eyes staring at the heavens, his mouth open in an astonishment that, like Martin Thompson's, would be permanent.

The car had turned around and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was moving up the road, but not as fast as it might have, even with a flat tire. Luke guessed that some part more vital than a tire had also been hit. The car would stop soon and the men in it would then have to run.

"What do you think we'd better do?" Luke called to the sheriff. "I think they'll run for it instead of staying in the car."

"If we let them go into the sage again, it'll be worse than if we go after them when they get out of the car."

The car stopped and the sheriff's eye began to pick out what cover existed, by way of which an advance might be made. Luke called that he would go out on one flank and maybe Brady should go on the other, or someone with a rifle. But they all waited for the car doors to open.

The doors didn't open.

The car began to back up, a good deal faster than it had been going forward.

"The forward gears must be hit!" Brady called. "They're going to try for one of the other cars!"

Ty Creedon ran across the intersection, calling, "It's like a tank!"

Luke emptied a clip into the car and tried to decide whether to stand where he was or to slip to the side and try to fire through the side windows of the backing car.

The sheriff, like Brady, knew the fugitives were going to try for another car. It was their one real chance. He saw Luke, he saw Brady, he heard his son-in-law yelp once like a puppy and shake his left hand, which had been steadying his gun hand. But the son-in-law was behaving well.

The sheriff saw an arm and what seemed to be an eye and an ear show at the open window of the car. He fired, snap-shooting, and saw the arm go limp. It hung over the side, waving with the car's motion.

The backing car reached Luke's car and a door opened, but only one man emerged—the driver, shooting, running, bobbing. The sheriff raised his arm again when he heard the rifle and another gun go off. The running figure fell kicking.

Silence was louder than the guns. The sheriff stood up first, watching the riddled car. Then he walked slowly to it. Two bodies lay in the back seat.

He walked back to where the others stood. Facing them, he could see who was there: Luke, Brady, his son-in-law. Creedon was emerging from behind the store, and probably no one but Creedon would ever know much about what he might have done today. But he still carried his silver-mounted pistol in his hand.

Horton and Bloodgood were not in sight. The proprietor was coming out of his store, and soon the men who had been on the lake front would appear. Then everyone would be accounted for, the sheriff thought, almost idly. But even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then he heard back of him another car arriving. This car had a horse trailer too. The little rise of ground hid from its occupants both the riddled car and the bodies on the ground.

Luke stood his empty rifle against the hitching post and set about tying a handkerchief tight around the son-in-law's middle finger. The tip of the finger was gone.

Brady looked tired. "If you got no objection, Sheriff, I'd just as soon get along. I had about enough for today."

"No objection," the sheriff said. "I want to thank you."

Brady shrugged, "I suppose it might have been worse. There might have been more of them here. I got a feeling, though, that this is the end of the posse. For me it is. Nothing personal, you understand."

The sheriff nodded. "Of course," he said.

"In fact, I'm going to turn in my badge right now."

Luke approached the sheriff, and seeing what Brady was doing, removed his own badge.

"Can't say I blame you, Luke," the sheriff said. "Seems like I heard that's what Ellen wanted some little while ago."

Luke nodded. "I had to come here today to know what she was talking about. Anyhow, I can't think of a better time to turn it in."

While they talked, Lodray Smith and two other posse men came up to the sheriff. The riddled car and the dead on the ground were back of them, and they had caught only a glimpse of the bodies.

"Why, what's the matter, boy?" Lodray Smith said to Brady. "You got no call to turn in your badge. Looks to me like you and the other boys done all right."

"If you'd come a little earlier, Lodray," Brady said, "you'd know better."

"Anyhow," Luke heard himself say, "two of them didn't do so good." He would not have said it to Lodray yesterday.

"At least two," the sheriff said, and then wished he hadn't.

Luke and Elwood Brady turned to walk to the car they had come in. They had no intention of offending Lodray Smith or anyone else; they simply felt there was nothing more to be said. Behind them, they heard Lodray ask querulously, "You aren't expecting all of us to turn in our badges, are you, Sheriff? We got here just as soon as—"

"I leave that to you," the sheriff said. "But if you're going to stick around, you might begin to help with those bodies back of you."

The newcomers turned. When they had arrived a few moments before, the bodies on the ground had been partly hidden by the car.

"But those two nearest bandits look like posse men." Lodray's voice had become querulous again. He noticed one of the white hats on the ground.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes," the sheriff said. "That's what I mean by leaving it up to you about turning in the badges." He turned and walked up onto the porch of the store. "What kind of soft drinks you got, Albert?" he said to the proprietor. Behind him he heard someone crying, but he did not turn to look.

When the sheriff came out again, a bottle of lemon soda in his hand, he saw that Luke had changed his mind about leaving. Luke had spread a canvas on the ground and, with Brady, was lifting Leach Morgan's body onto it. They would need help with someone as big as Thompson, the sheriff knew. He went out to join them.

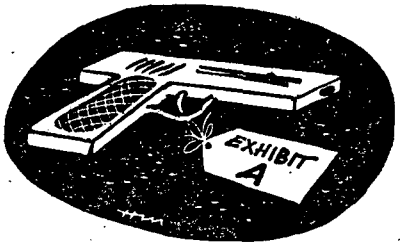
As he came up, Luke said to him, "I think I'd better call Ellen. She may have heard something, and she'll be worried."

"Go ahead, son," the sheriff said. "Tell her not to worry—now or any time." As he said this he placed a hand on Luke's shoulder, and for some reason Luke's eyes suddenly smarted with tears.

Luke turned away and went toward the store to call his girl. His heart was full with a deep sadness for the men who lay dead; and the knowledge of why Ellen had always wanted him to quit the posse lay heavily on him.

He remembered what she had said about instruments of violence being in the hands of men who were not trained for violence, or by character suited to it. She wasn't quite right, he thought, but she was close enough.

He felt a great need to talk with Ellen now, and he quickened his steps to the store and the telephone.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WENZELL BROWN**

TITLE: ***An Old Wives' Tale***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: When Tim was eight years old—and now

COMMENTS: *A nostalgic recollection of boyhood, and the mystery that remained a secret for twenty years, and the scars that time will never erase, and the golden memories too . . .*

THE LONELY COTTAGE WAS perched on a hillside, fronting a narrow path hidden by the woods. From the road only the rear of the building and the hen house could be seen.

There was nothing about the tall ungainly woman who lived there to arouse the interest of a boy of eight. I would have remained incurious if it had not been for my parents' open disapproval of her.

One evening at dusk my mother stood at the window of our farm. She spoke with sharp distaste. "There's that Mrs. Sweetser and Judd Crimmins is with her again."

"She's a bad lot," my father answered.

"Some night there'll be trouble up there, I'll be bound."

I pressed my face against the window. In the twilight I could barely make out the blurred silhouettes of the man and woman who walked a bit apart, but they seemed to possess some quality that was both eerie and sinister.

"What kind of trouble?" I asked.

I regretted the question the moment it left my tongue. My mother looked down at me, her face cool and withdrawn. "It's nothing you'd understand, Tim." Then turning toward my father, she said apologetically, "I shouldn't have spoken in front of the child."

My father shrugged. "It doesn't matter. He'd better be warned to keep away from the woman."

Sensing a lecture, I slipped out of the room and the next day I stopped in the roadway to stare up at Mrs. Sweetser's house.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was no sign of life but it seemed to me the windows stared back with baleful eyes. This had become a forbidden place, haunting and mysterious. A pleasurable curl of fear made me scuttle past the clearing and climb through the rotting gate of the property beyond.

The land here was posted with "No Trespassing" signs. A rutted road, clogged with briers, led to sandbanks. Years earlier the central deposits of sand had been excavated. Now it was a magic spot in which to play. I could leap from the jagged banks into the loose mounds of sand or roll down the slopes, or imagine myself in a vast desert where I would have died of thirst if I had not first gorged myself with dewberries, the vines of which twisted around the edges of the pits.

One afternoon I built a sand house with elaborate care, moistening the sand with water from a stagnant pool and pounding the walls so solid that they could withstand the light summer showers. I snapped off twigs and made a tree-lined driveway leading to the house.

Soon I became engrossed in my game. Within a week I had built a whole village. I could hardly wait to perform my morning chores, gobble up my lunch, and escape to the sand pits.

Then tragedy struck. One day I found my village destroyed. The house had been kicked down, the trees trampled under foot. I stared at the havoc until tears blinded me. Then I fell to the earth, cradled my face in my arms, and wept.

I do not know how long I lay there before I became aware of an alien presence. At first I saw only the scuffed saddle shoes, the coarse brown stockings above them, and the hem of a cotton print dress with a design of faded flowers. I was too terrified to look up or try to roll away.

The woman squatted beside me and her hand caressed my cheek. I flinched, but her fingers were surprisingly gentle, and when she spoke, her voice was deep and full, but gentle too.

"What's the matter, boy? You ain't hurt, be you?"

"No," I whispered. "No." Then I sobbed out the story of my ruined village.

She held me until I finished. Not until then did I really look at her. She seemed enormous. The skin of her powerful arms was like the bark of an oak tree. The loose-fitting dress flapped about her body and she wore a wide-brimmed straw hat. Her features were strong and bold, with broad cheekbones. She was freckled and her hair was the same shade of faded straw as her hat. Her eyes were blue and penetrating, with crinkles around the edges, and there was humor in her wide firm mouth.

She said thoughtfully, "It must have been Judd who did this. I saw him lurking in the bushes. That's why I came over this way."

"Judd Crimmins? I hate him!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Easy, boy. You start hatin' and pretty soon you'll hate the whole world." Her tone grew lighter. "Let's build something bigger'n a house. What about a castle with turret towers, and maybe a moat?"

She started to pile the sand high and I ran to fetch water in a rusted tin can.

When the castle rose in its full splendor she leaned back against a knoll, bracing herself with her arms.

"What's your name, son?"

"Tim. Tim Carpenter."

Wariness crept into her voice. "Doc Carpenter's son?"

I nodded.

"I guess your dad wouldn't like you being here with me. All the same it's safer than playin' alone, with the likes of Judd Crimmins about."

I said shyly, "I like you."

She tousled my hair and drew me closer to her. "I like you too, Tim. But Molly Sweetser's got a bad name in these parts. You better not tell your dad about today."

"Oh, I won't. Never."

"I reckon maybe he's warned you to steer clear of me."

"No," I said hesitantly. Then I repeated the denial more boldly. After all, I wasn't lying. No direct order had been given me regarding Mrs. Sweetser.

"That's good. I wouldn't want you to disobey your dad."

She heaved herself to her feet and stood smiling at me. "What about some cookies and lemonade before you go? Would you like that?"

I gave a shy nod.

"Come on then." She led the way across the top of the sandbanks and along the narrow path which brought us to the front door of her cottage. There were two battered canvas chairs and an unpainted table on the porch.

She sat me down in one of the chairs and went to the kitchen. I heard the clatter of plates and the sound of the pump as she drew water. A few minutes later she returned with a platter piled high with gingerbread cookies and a pewter pitcher filled with lemonade.

It seemed to me the most delicious food I had ever tasted. We sat in companionable silence for half an hour or so, then I looked at the sky and knew it was time for me to be getting home.

I wanted to thank her but the words were hard to find. She made things easy by giving me a rough hug. "You're not scared of me, are you, Tim? You know I wouldn't hurt you."

I was pleased, but embarrassed too. I wriggled free and raced toward home but, where the path curved, I turned and waved . . .

For the rest of the summer I saw Mrs. Sweetser almost every day. I would slip away from home, taking a roundabout route through the woods so that no one would suspect my destination. Sometimes we played in the sandbanks or hunted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for lady's-slippers or painted trilliums, or picked berries.

But the place we loved most was the abandoned ice pond deep in the woods. It was surrounded by pine trees, whose brown needles made a thick blanket on the earth. The rim of the pond was clogged with swamp grass and cow lilies, and dragonflies zoomed over its still surface. But in the center the water was clear, deep, and cold.

We would strip down to our underclothing, cavort in the water, then lie in the sun to dry before donning our outer clothes. Nothing could have been more innocent than our play, yet there were those in the community who were to read evil into it. The first of these was Judd Crimmins.

Judd was the handyman on the Hodgson farm. He was short but powerfully built, with a shaggy black beard that covered most of his face, bright shoe-button eyes, and lips which were very red and always moist. He was an unreliable worker, quarrelsome, frequently drunk, and reputedly a thief. The only reason he was tolerated was that he was Mrs. Hodgson's half brother. In return for such chores as he performed, he was permitted to rig up a cubicle in the rear of the barn and was given food from the family table.

One day when we were disporting ourselves in the pond, Judd Crimmins appeared on the bank. He was dressed, as usual, in a soiled khaki shirt, baggy blue pants, and the stocking cap that never seemed to leave his head. He was picking his teeth and grinning, his greedy little eyes hard and mean.

I had been splashing Mrs. Sweetser but I stopped in mid-motion, staring in frightened fascination at the man.

Mrs. Sweetser followed my gaze and when she spoke, her voice was unexpectedly loud and harsh. "You git out o' here, Judd Crimmins. You git back where you belong."

"Reckon I'll take my time, Molly. Seems like you and me got a little business to transact."

"You got any cash, Judd? Your credit ain't no good. You're owin' me six dollars now."

"Guess I don't have to worry about credit. How'd you like Doc Carpenter to know you're playin' with his kid, swimmin' around naked and all."

"I'm not naked. I'm wearin' bloomers and a shirt."

Judd's lips curled back over stubby teeth. "Come on out, Molly, and let me see."

"I'm stayin' right here till you go. You want to talk to me, I'll meet you at the house. But now you better scat if you know what's good for you."

Judd's shoulders rose in an elaborate shrug but he turned and walked away.

I was scared and shivering as I crept out of the water. Already it seemed to me that I could feel the weight of my father's strap on my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back, but that was a minor fear. Within me was the cold dread that I would be separated from Mrs. Sweetser.

She had slipped her dress on over her wet underclothing. I looked at her miserably. "Do you think he'll really tell my dad?"

"No. I know how to handle Judd. I'll shut him up."

She dropped on her knees and put both hands on my shoulders. Then she said, "In a way, Judd's right. I've been a selfish, wicked old woman, involvin' a boy in my troubles because I was lonely. From now on you better forget me, Tim. You better not come around no more."

I threw my arms about her. "I'll never leave you," I cried. "Never! Never!"

She sighed. "We'll see about that, Tim. But right now you head for home. Judd'll be waitin' at my place and I better get there before he turns restless."

After that I continued my visits to Mrs. Sweetser, but the spontaneous joy of our meetings withered. She would let me sit on the porch and sometimes she would play in the sand pits or go with me to collect chokecherries. But we never went back to the ice pond and she seemed sad and worried.

Occasionally men would stumble out of the woods not far from her cottage. They were roughly dressed men, in grease-stained overalls, their faces begrimed. I judged that they came from the squatter village near the roundhouse at the far side of the woods.

Whenever they arrived Mrs. Sweetser would send me scooting for home, but I did not always obey. Sometimes I would hide behind a tree to watch. The men would climb the porch, their manner furtive and ingratiating. There would be a brief conversation, then Mrs. Sweetser would precede her caller into the house. A minute or two later, the men would come out, moving more boldly, as though hurrying toward the protection of the woods.

Gradually, Mrs. Sweetser's guilty secret was revealed to me. Somewhere, hidden deep in the woods, she had a still. The men who visited her clandestinely came to buy illicit whiskey.

It was Lucius Bracken who spelled things out for me. He was seventeen, the son of the Sheriff, and the one person of whom I dared ask questions.

"Sure, Molly Sweetser sells moonshine," he said. "But what of it? I guess a man who's done a hard day's work has got a right to quench his thirst, in spite of the law around here that says he ain't. Of course there are bluenoses like your dad who are always after my old man to pull a raid and maybe clap Molly in jail. But I reckon your dad shouldn't be sticking his nose in other people's business, if you know what I mean."

I knew all right. My father was a born reformer, a man who laid down the rules for others, a believer in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hellfire and brimstone, a firm adherent of the edict not to spare the rod and spoil the child. He was the only doctor in the county at that time and the people needed him but, even so, he had earned many enemies by his stiff-necked code.

I wanted to tell Mrs. Sweetser that, in the conflict between herself and my father, I was on her side; but these were words a boy could not speak.

One afternoon we sat on her porch watching a hawk wheel high in the sky. I said, "I wish I were a bird. I'd fly miles and miles, right around the world and back again."

Mrs. Sweetser was lost in thought. I tugged at her skirt. "Wouldn't you like to be a bird?"

A shadow crossed her face, then she smiled, entering into the game. "I don't know, Tim. I hear birds always live in danger from bigger birds. Besides, lots of times they're swept out to sea in storms, and drowned. Me, I like to live nice and comfy. I think I'd rather be a cow. Now a cow's got an easy pleasant life. Nothin' to do all day but chew grass and when night comes, she's led home to a nice warm barn. I tell you what, son. One of these days you're going to come up here and find me changed into a cow."

"Do you mean it?"

"Course I do. When I was young, I learned a thing or two about black magic. I could turn the trick easy as snapping my fingers."

The conversation was broken off by the sight of Judd Crimmins' shambling figure on the pathway. Without waiting for Mrs. Sweetser's bidding, I ducked around the side of the house and raced across the fields toward home.

A few days later Mrs. Sweetser said, "You'll be startin' school tomorrow, boy, and you won't be comin' around so much. Before that happens there's something I want to show you."

She took my hand and led me to the hen house. Once inside, she put the heavy wooden latch on the door. In the dim light her face was no more than a pale blur. I had never heard her voice so solemn.

"I'm going to let you in on my secret, Tim. But first you've got to swear you'll never tell another living soul."

"Cross my heart and hope to die."

Her head bobbed. "Now, you come with me."

She went to the corner where gray light filtered in through a streaked window. A nesting hen squawked and scuttled away as she slapped at it. She plunged her hand into the thick layers of hay which formed the nest and pulled out an old red-and-gold coffee can. She reached beneath the nest a second time and pulled out another can.

"This is treasure trove, Tim. I keep it here 'cause it's safer'n the house and I don't want no truck with banks."

She pried the top off one of the cans and held the can to the light so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I could see its contents. It was crammed with money. The bills were crinkled and dull with age but I could read the denominations. A few were singles but most were fives or tens, with a scattering of twenties.

"It's a lot of money, Tim. If anything should happen to me, I want you should have it."

"What could happen to you?"

"Well, if your dad has his way, I might be going away for a spell. In that case, you could keep it till I come back 'cause there ain't nobody else I dare trust. Then there's Judd Crimmins always hangin' about. He's got me right edgy. Seems like he smells my treasure and there's no tellin' what he might do to lay his hands on it."

I clung to her. "Please don't go away."

"I'm gettin' along in years, Tim. It's near time for me to go out to pasture. If I got to go, I want you to have the money. Don't tell nobody, just come here and take it. Hide it somewhere safe till you're old enough to know what to do with it. Do you understand?"

I was sniffling. She put her hand on my shoulder with rough tenderness. "There ain't nothin' to cry about, boy. Maybe I'll change into a cow like I said I wanted to. Yes, I think maybe I'll do that. You'll take good care of me, won't you, Tim? When I'm a cow, I mean."

I didn't know whether she was joking or not, but I said fervently, "I will. I promise."

She clapped me on the back and we went out into the cool crisp air together and back to the porch to eat preserved strawberries and oatmeal cookies.

That was the last time I was ever to see Molly Sweetser. The next day after school, as I was racing down the path to her cottage, I stopped short. Her front door was gaping open but there was no stir of life about the place.

I don't know why the eerie sense of desolation struck me so soon. Perhaps it was because I knew that Mrs. Sweetser, unlike many farm people, never left her house without locking her doors.

I approached timidly, calling her name. There was no answer and the echo of my voice seemed preternaturally loud. I retreated to a hillock covered with shrubs and lay there, watching the house. My heart beat hard at first, but after a while it grew quiet and I must have dozed.

The squawking of hens awakened me. I peered out of the bower I had formed for myself. The front door was still sagging open, swaying a little in the breeze. I hitched myself to my knees, then fell flat again at the sound of stealthy movements at the rear of the house.

A shadow cut across the sunlight and a figure crouched in the clearing between the hen house and the cottage.

I saw the black-bearded face and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stocking cap of Judd Crimmins. He paused uncertainly at the corner of the house, staring first this way, then that. Then he set out at a jog trot, heading for the high brush. Under each of his arms was an old coffee can with a red-and-gold label.

I wanted to yell, "Stop, thief!" but my mouth was dry with fear and I was convinced that if I screamed he would come back and kill me.

I waited on the hillock until dusk, but Mrs. Sweetser did not return to the cottage. Nor was she there the next day, or the next. The door remained open, the house abandoned.

On the third day I stole into the hen house and felt beneath the nest which Mrs. Sweetser had shown me. The hay was disturbed and the coffee cans were gone. I had confirmed what I already knew. Judd Crimmins had stolen the money.

I had to tell someone that Mrs. Sweetser was missing. But who? My father had been in bed for three days, recovering from an accident. On the way back from a late night call his ancient Ford had run off the road into a ditch. Neighbors had found him behind the wheel, his face cut and bruised and a rib broken. My mother was nervous and distraught. I did not want to add to her anxiety. Besides, if I spoke to either of them, I would have to confess my daily visits to Mrs. Sweetser.

In the end it was Lucius Bracken on whom I unburdened my story. To my surprise he took me seriously. Within an hour the Sheriff was poking around the abandoned cottage.

I cried shrilly, "Judd Crimmins did something to her. He must have."

The Sheriff's voice was a slow drawl. "What makes you think that, son?"

"He was always spying on her and she hated him." I almost told about his theft of the coffee cans, but just in time I remembered my solemn promise.

The Sheriff drew his hand across his face. "You say Molly hated Judd Crimmins?"

"Yes, and she was scared of him too."

"That ain't the way I heard it, son. People around here was saying they were sort of sweet on each other."

"It's a lie! She hated him. She told me so herself."

"She might say that to a boy but that ain't the way it was."

"I don't understand."

"I reckon you don't, son. You're too young for that. Anyway, I better have a talk with Judd."

He strode away, Lucius at his heels. But they never did talk to Judd Crimmins. He had disappeared too. He hadn't been seen at the Hodgson farm for three days.

Gossip travels quickly in the country and soon unconfirmed rumor is stated as fact. According to the grapevine, Mrs. Sweetser and Judd Crimmins had run off together. People snickered at the oddly as-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sorted pair eloping, but no one seemed to doubt that it was true except myself. At eight, I could not make my voice heard. Not even Lucius Bracken would listen.

"Lay off, Tim," he said. "Molly packed her suitcases and left. That's all there is to it."

"She wouldn't leave her house."

"It wasn't her house. She was just renting it and she was two months behind. Besides, she was afraid of going to jail. That's two good reasons for her lighting out without telling anyone."

"She didn't, I tell you! She hated Judd."

"That's what you think. I could tell you some things about Judd and Molly, but my old man told me to keep my mouth shut."

A week passed before I found the cow wandering on the edges of the abandoned sand pits.

She was an old brindle cow, so thin that her ribs stood out against her tightly drawn skin. Her legs had stiffened and her udders had withered and turned a sickly gray.

I stared in fascination. There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that Mrs. Sweetser had kept her word and used black magic to change herself into a cow.

The animal shied away at first, but soon she was eating grass from my hand and muzzling her head against my shoulder.

"I'll take good care of you, Mrs. Sweetser," I whispered. "Just like I promised."

There was no difficulty in leading the cow home. She followed me haltingly, stiff-leggedly, making soft bawling sounds from time to time.

My father was coming out of the barn as we entered the yard. He looked at me, then at the cow. "Where did you pick up that ugly, spavined old beast?"

"I found her."

He came closer and snapped his fingers. "She must be Amos Smith's Betsy. Amos died a month back and one of his cows was missing. Well, she's no good now. She's old and sick. The sooner she's put out of her misery the better."

"No," I cried. "I've got to keep her. I promised I would. She's Mrs. Sweetser."

My father laughed, but when he spoke his manner was stern. "What kind of nonsense are you talking, son?"

"It's *not* nonsense. Mrs. Sweetser said she'd turn into a cow and she did."

"Now stop right here, Tim. I won't have you repeating an old wives' tale."

When my father spoke like that it was useless to answer. Still I tried.

"I've *got* to keep her," I repeated. "I gave my word."

My father's face was growing mottled with anger, but before he could say more, my mother joined us. She said quietly, "Put the cow in the barn for tonight, Tim. Tomorrow we'll talk things over."

I slept poorly that night, worry-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing how to plead my case or, if that failed, how to spirit the cow away to a safe place. In the morning there was no chance to talk. I was hustled off to school while my father was still in bed.

When I returned from school the cow was gone. It took me a while to find out what had happened. My father had shot her through the head and with the help of Lucius Bracken, had dug a grave for her beneath the laurel bushes that bordered the woods.

I flung myself on the freshly turned earth and wept uncontrollably. When my father approached, I ran into the woods and hid there until nightfall.

The next day I constructed a crude wooden cross and painstakingly painted Mrs. Sweetser's name on it. I put the cross into the earth and cut pine and spruce boughs to decorate the grave.

I hated my father for what he had done and I would not speak to him. To me the cow was Mrs. Sweetser and his act was murder. I sat in sullen silence at the table, and as soon as I could I escaped from my father's presence.

Each day I scoured the woods and fields for late blooming flowers and branches of red berries and placed them on Mrs. Sweetser's grave.

Then one afternoon my father surprised me there. Some stubborn pride forced me to face up to him.

He said, "Tim, what's ailing you? It was only a cow. Sick, old, and in pain."

"She was Mrs. Sweetser."

"Now stop that, Tim."

"I won't," I screamed. "She was Mrs. Sweetser and you murdered her. And I hate you. Do you hear?—I hate you!"

Suddenly my father took me by the scruff of the neck and marched me toward the tool shed. I knew what was coming even before I saw him reach for the strap that hung from a nail behind the door.

My father shouted angrily, "I'm going to beat some sense into you, Tim. No more talk about murder and Mrs. Sweetser changing into a cow. Have you got that straight?"

I had been whipped before and had always submitted meekly; but this time I fought back. I was no match for my father and he thrashed me soundly, but never once did I give up the struggle until at length he threw the strap in a corner, flung the door open, and stalked away.

From then on the enmity between myself and my father was open. We rarely spoke to each other. He avoided me with as much care as I avoided him. Throughout the winter I mourned Mrs. Sweetser and visited the grave beside the laurels nearly every day. My father must have observed me but he never interfered again.

That spring the rift between us became complete. My mother died of a sickness that had long afflicted her. My father and I attended the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

funeral together but I never returned home. An aunt and uncle took me to Boston and I lived with them from that time on.

My father went back to the farm and to his country practice. At rare intervals news about him drifted my way. With my mother's death his whole personality seemed to disintegrate. He, who had led the crusade against liquor, unexpectedly turned to drink. The local people no longer trusted him and his practice was largely taken over by a younger man. Even the farm was untended, and fell to wrack and ruin.

I did not want to think of my father. I loved my aunt and uncle with a warmth I had never felt for my parents. I enjoyed the school I attended and later there were four happy years at college. After graduation I secured work on a Boston newspaper, where I am still employed.

Gradually over the passing years I recognized the ridiculousness of my assumption that a woman could turn into a cow. The realization mellowed my attitude toward my father, but it did not change it basically. We had drifted too far apart.

Perhaps I would have forgotten all about that boyhood summer long ago if I had not been in the newsroom when a "stringer" from Rockmount County telephoned in a story. During the excavations for a new housing development in the rural area where I had once lived, the skeleton of a woman had been uncovered. The coroner estimated that the body had been buried for nearly twenty years and there was speculation as to whether or not the woman could have been Molly Sweetser.

At my request I was assigned to cover the story. Some compulsive force made me drive throughout the night and I arrived in Cripple's Corner the next morning. Lucius Bracken was Sheriff now. I called at his office and he greeted me as an old friend; but when I told him of my mission the corners of his mouth turned down.

"Why rake up the past, Tim? What can it matter now?"

"I have to know the truth," I said stubbornly.

Reluctantly he took me to the spot where the remains of the body had been found. It was not far from the ice pond where Mrs. Sweetser and I had swum so often. A bank of laurels bordered the woods and she had been buried beneath them.

"How did she die?" I asked.

"She was shot. The bullet lodged in her skull."

"Lucius, Judd Crimmins killed her. He can still be tried—there's no statute of limitations on murder."

Then I told him about the coffee cans and their treasure trove of crumpled bills and of seeing Judd leaving the hen house with the cans under his arms.

Lucius sighed. "You were eight years old then and you said nothing about it at that time. Anyway, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may have a case against Judd for theft—but you've no proof of murder."

"If I could find him I'd make him tell me the truth."

"He's not hard to find. He's been back at the Hodgson place for years. I'll go along with you—I don't want you and Judd getting into a tussle."

When we arrived at the Hodgson farm, Judd was not there. We went away, but I returned alone that afternoon. I skirted the house and went directly to the barn where I found Judd in his filthy cubicle, sleeping on an unmade bunk.

I stood looking down at him, surprised at how little he had changed. His beard was streaked with gray but the stocking cap was still perched on top of his head and his lips were still very red and moist, puffing in and out with his snoring.

I shook him roughly by the shoulder. His shoe-button eyes clicked open and panic glittered deep inside them. He shuddered away from me, crouching on the bed, his back pressed against the wall.

He muttered, "Who are you? What do you want?"

I was taken aback by his failure to recognize me though there could be little resemblance between my present self and the eight-year-old boy he had known. "I'm Tim Carpenter," I said, "and I've come to get the truth out of you."

I had expected him to cower or bluster, but he did neither. The sound of my name seemed to reassure him. He rose slowly to his feet and a sly grin creased his lips. He was smaller than I had remembered. The top of his head barely reached my shoulder.

"So you're Tim," he said. "Now what would you be wantin' o' me?"

"You killed Mrs. Sweetser," I accused.

He shook his head from side to side. "You're wrong there, boy. I never harmed hide nor hair of her."

"You're lying. You were always pestering her. She was afraid of you."

"Not like you think. Molly was running a still, you know—used to be the best moonshine in these parts. Now, I'm one as likes to wet his whistle once in a while, so I owed Molly for a pint or two every so often."

"Quit stalling. I saw you creeping out of Mrs. Sweetser's hen house just after she disappeared. You had two old coffee cans filled with money in your hands."

Judd's voice became almost soft. "So you knew about Molly's treasure, did you? All right, I took it. I guess I had as much right to it as anybody else."

"When did you kill her? Was it that day or the night before you stole her money?"

"Use your head, Tim. I never owned a gun. I wouldn't even know how to shoot one."

My fists clenched and I stepped toward him threateningly. "You're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to tell me the ruth, Judd, if I have to beat it out of you."

He ducked away and backed into a corner. I didn't see the rusted crowbar until it was in his hands. He watched me with a strange gloating in his eyes. "The truth, eh? Believe me, boy, you don't want to know the truth. That's the last thing you want."

I watched the bar, wondering if I could grab it before he could attack me. I said, "You can tell me or you can deal with the Sheriff. This is murder, Judd."

"All right, Tim. I can see you're going to raise a stink. But I warn you —it won't do nothing but harm. Let the dead past bury the dead. Go away and forget Molly Sweetser. That's the best way."

"No."

"So you won't leave it be . . . All right then. I'll tell you the truth but you ain't going to like it. So maybe you'll try something funny like taking a poke at me and I'll have to lay you out cold with this here bar. Better sit down, Tim."

Reluctantly I sat down on a splintered packing case that served as a chair. Somehow Judd was turning the tables on me and I felt uncertain of myself.

He began to speak in singsong tones. "I was with Molly the night she died. Just the two of us, sittin' in the kitchen having a nice friendly drink. Oh, I know you don't believe Molly and me was friends. But we were. It was only when you was around she wouldn't let me come to see her. Molly wasn't no angel but I'll hand her this: she loved you like you was her own kid.

"Well, there we was, when there's a hell of a-knockin' on the door. Molly jumps up and opens it. And who's there? Old Bluenose himself. Yes, your dad. Somehow he'd learned about you and Molly. Maybe I was to blame for that, runnin' off at the mouth when I'd had one too many. Anyway, Doc's dead set for trouble. He'd been tryin' to close Molly's still for a long time and send her to jail. But he can't make the Sheriff get movin'.

"Your dad's practically breathin' fire. He says he's going to force Molly to lead him to the still and he brings out a gun to make her do it. One of them snub-nosed shiny revolvers. Well, Molly don't scare worth two cents. She stands there defyin' him, tellin' him to clear out o' her house. Your dad's gettin' rattled. But he's a stubborn cuss, just like you.

"He makes a lunge like he's going to grab Molly and I throw a bottle at him. I miss but the glass splinters all around him. It's just the chance Molly's been waitin' for. She snatches up a frying pan and goes for him. Hits him smack on the side of the face. He reels back but Molly ain't through. She smacks him again.

"Then his gun goes off with a roar seems like you can hear halfway to the moon. Molly don't even scream.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She just slumps to the floor, gives one little jerk, and lies still.

"Your dad kneels beside her, and when he looks up his face is white as a ghost. 'She's dead,' he says. 'I killed her.'

" 'That you did,' I tells him, 'and I'll see you pay for it.'

" 'But it was an accident,' he says.

" 'Not the way I'm going to tell it. You come bustin' in here with a gun. That's murder, plain and simple.'

"Well, I ain't going into all the details of the deal me and your dad made, but it ended up by me and him lugging Molly to the ice pond and buryin' her in the soft earth by the laurel bushes. Then we pack some clothes, so's to make it look like she's gone away. We clean up the kitchen so everything's shipshape.

"By now your dad's face is all swole up and he's bleedin' where Molly hit him with the skillet. He's got to find an excuse for that, so he drives his Ford down the road a mile or so and runs it into a ditch. That's the story, Tim. Like it or lump it."

"You're lying," I shouted. "You wouldn't help dad."

"For five hundred bucks I would. And that's what he paid me. Cash on the barrel-head. Next day I snoop around and find the money that Molly's hid. I never had so much in my life and I thought it would last forever, so I hit the road for Florida and had myself a good time. But it ain't long before the money gives out, so I pull a little job that lands me in the hoosegow for three years. After that I beat my way back here. I don't need much but a bottle off and on. Your dad fixes me up with that."

"You mean you're still blackmailing him?"

"Call it that if you want. I ain't thin-skinned. I reckon your dad owes me a-plenty. I ain't said nary a word all these years. And you better keep your trap shut, too, unless you want to see your old man stand trial for murder."

I rose unsteadily. I didn't know whether to believe Judd or not, but I had to get out before I was sick.

There was a wind outside and the air had a nip in it. I hardly noticed. Without realizing it I started along the winding road to the farm. There were changes along the way. New houses. Streets laid out across what had once been open fields. But the old farm remained untouched. Grass grew high on the lawn and the buildings needed paint.

I slowed my pace at the back door. Through the kitchen window I could see my father hunched at a table, a glass clenched in his hand, a bottle at his side. I thought he had taken to drink because of my mother. I wondered now if I could have been wrong.

The door gave way under my hand. I walked into the kitchen and stood gazing at my father.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He saw me but he made no attempt to rise or greet me. After a while he sighed and asked, "Why did you come back, Tim?"

"I've been talking with Judd Crimmins about the night Molly Sweetser died."

He turned away from me and poured another drink. He didn't raise his eyes again. He didn't need to. In the slump of his shoulders and the ashen color of his face I read the certain knowledge that Judd Crimmins had not lied.

It was true that my father had shot Mrs. Sweetser through the head and buried her body beneath the mountain laurels that grew by the edge of the woods. Both Mrs. Sweetsers.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	All Originals PRICE	ON SALE
Aiken, Joan	THE SILENCE OF HERONDALE	Doubleday & Co.	$3.50	7/3
Blake, Nicholas	THE SAD VARIETY	Harper & Row	3.95	7/15
Boucher, Anthony (edited by)	BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR—1964	E. P. Dutton	3.95	7/15
Bush, Christopher	THE CASE OF THE HEAVENLY TWIN	Macmillan Co.	3.95	7/6
Creasey, John	HANG THE LITTLE MAN	Charles Scribner's Sons	3.50	7/29
Fletcher, Lucille	THE STRANGE BLUE YAWL	Random House	3.95	7/14
Highsmith, Patricia	THE TWO FACES OF JANUARY	Doubleday & Co.	3.50	7/17
James, Breni	THE SHAKE UP	Simon & Schuster	3.50	7/10
Kemelman, Harry	FRIDAY THE RABBI SLEPT LATE	Crown Publishers	3.95	6/15
Roffman, Jan	DEATH OF A FOX	Doubleday & Co.	3.50	7/17

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Gill, Josephine	DEAD OF SUMMER	Popular Library	50¢	7/2

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE DEATH OF DON JUAN

by ELLERY QUEEN

(*Continued from page 31*)

ACT II. Scene 1.

"This character is clean off his chump," Dullman said, jamming a fresh cigar between his teeth. "Imagine playing around with the trick knife and the goo at a time like this. How about acting your age, Benedict? In fact, how about acting?" He brushed past Ellery. "Come on, snap out of it."

"Don't touch him," Ellery said.

Dullman stared at him. "You're kidding."

"No."

Dullman's mouth opened and the cigar fell out. He stooped and fumbled for it.

Ellery leaned over the dressing table, keeping his hands to himself. The skin was a mud-yellow and the lips were already cyanotic. Benedict's eyes were open. As Ellery's face came within their focus they fluttered and rolled.

He saw now that the stain was spreading.

"Bluefield," Dullman said. "My God, where's Bluefield? I've got to find Bluefield."

"Never mind Bluefield. I saw a doctor I know in the audience—Dr. Farnham. Hurry, Dullman."

Dullman turned blindly to the doorway. It was blocked by the cast and the stagehands. None of them appeared to understand what had happened. Joan Truslow had her hand to her mouth childishly, looking at the blood and the knife. As Dullman broke through he collided with Roger Fowler, coming fast.

"What's going on? Where's Joan?"

"Out of my way, damn you," Dullman said. He stumbled toward the stage.

Ellery shut the door and went quickly back to the dressing table. "Benedict, can you talk?"

The lips trembled a little. The jaws opened and closed and opened again, and a thick sound came out. It was just a sound, meaningless.

"Who knifed you?"

The jaws moved again. They were like the jaws of a fish newly yanked from the water. This time not even the thick sound came out.

"Benedict, do you hear me?" The eyes remained fixed. "If you understand what I'm saying, blink."

The eyelids came down and went up.

"Rest a moment. You're going to be all right." You're going to be dead, Ellery thought. Where the devil was Dr. Farnham? He won't be able to touch the knife, he thought.

The door burst open. Dr. Conklin Farnham hurried in. Dullman ran in after him and shut the door and leaned against it, breathing hard.

"Hello, Conk," Ellery said. "All I want from him is a name."

Dr. Franham glanced at the knife wound and his mouth thinned out. He took Benedict's dangling arm without raising it and placed his fingertips on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the artery. Then he felt the artery in the temple, examined the staring eyes.

"Call an ambulance."

"And the police," Ellery said.

Arch Dullman opened the door once more. The cast and the stagehands were still standing outside, all except Joan and Roger. Dullman said something to someone and shut the door again.

"Can't you at least stop the bleeding, Conk?"

"It's pretty much stopped by itself."

And Ellery saw that the stain was no longer spreading. "I've got to talk to him. Is it all right?"

The doctor nodded. His lips formed the words, *Any minute now.*

"Benedict," Ellery said. "Use the eye signal again. Do you still hear me?"

Benedict blinked.

"Listen. You were sitting here making up. Someone opened your door and crossed the room. You could see who it was in the mirror. Who was it came at you with the knife?"

The bluing lips parted. The tongue fluttered; its sound was like a small bird's wings. Finally a grudging gurgle emerged. Dr. Farnham was feeling for the pulse again.

"He's going, Ellery." This time he said the words aloud.

"You're dying, man," Ellery cried. "*Who knifed you?*"

The struggle was an admirable thing. He was really trying to communicate. But then over the eyes slipped a substance through which they looked far and away. Without warning the dying man raised his head a full inch from the dressing table, and he held it there quite steadily. He made the fish mouth again.

But from it now, in a confiding whisper, came two words.

Then the head fell back to the table with a noise like wood. The actor seemed to clear his throat. His body stiffened in some last instinctive stubbornness and his breath emptied long and gently and he was altogether empty.

"He's dead," Dr. Farnham said after a moment.

Dullman said in a queer voice, "What did he say?"

"He's dead," Ellery said.

"I mean *him*. I didn't hear what he said from here."

"You heard him, Conk."

"Yes," the doctor said. " 'The heroine.' "

"That's what he said." Ellery turned away. He felt as empty as Benedict looked.

"The heroine." Dullman laughed. "Get what you wanted, Queen? Feel like a big man now?"

"He didn't know her name," Ellery said, as if this explained something important.

"I don't understand," Dr. Farnham said.

"Benedict arrived so late tonight there wasn't time for introductions. He could only identify her by her role in the play. The heroine."

Ellery turned away.

"But I took Joan's appendix out when she was fifteen," Dr. Farnham muttered. "My father delivered her."

Someone rapped on the door. Dullman opened it.

"I'm told something's happened to Mr. Benedict—"

"Well, look who's here," Dullman said. "Come on in, Bluefield."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ACT II. Scene 2.

Stanley Bluefield's shoes, the cuffs of his trousers, were soaked.

"I've been walking and walking. You see, I couldn't stand what he was doing to the play. I felt that if I stayed one minute longer . . ."

"Stanley," Ellery said.

"And how dreadful," Stanley went on, still looking at the occupied chair. "I mean, he doesn't look human any more, does he? I've never seen this kind of death."

"Stanley—"

"But he brought it on himself, wouldn't you say? You can't go about humiliating people that way. People who've never done you any harm. Who killed him?"

Ellery swung the little man around. "You'll have to talk to the audience, Stanley. I think you'd better use the word 'accident.' And tell your ushers privately not to allow anyone to leave the theater until the police get here."

"Who killed him?"

"Will you do that?"

"Yes, of course," Stanley said. He squished out, leaving a damp trail.

Ellery wandered back to the dressing table. All at once he stooped for a closer look at the knife handle.

Dr. Farnham stirred.

"It's a fact they're taking their sweet time," Dullman said. "You want out, Doctor?"

"I left my wife in the audience," Farnham said stiffly.

"Don't worry about Molly, Conk." Ellery dug a small leather case out of his pocket. "And you're my corroborating witness to Benedict's statement."

"That's right," Dullman said. "I didn't hear a thing. I don't have the stomach that goes with ears like yours."

The leather case produced a powerful little lens, and through it Ellery examined the handle of the knife on both sides.

"What," Dullman jeered, "no deerstalker hat?"

Ellery ignored him. The heavy haft had been recently wound in black plastic friction tape. An eighth of an inch from the edge, the tape showed a straight line of thin, irregular indentations some five-eighths of an inch long. In a corresponding position on the underside there was a line of indentations similar in character and length.

Ellery stowed away his lens. "By the way, Dullman, have you seen this knife before?"

"Any particular reason why I should tell you?"

"Any particular reason why you shouldn't?"

"It's not mine. I don't know whose it is."

"But you have seen it before." When Dullman did not answer, Ellery added, "Believe me, I know how much you wish you were out of this." The way Dullman's glance shifted made Ellery smile faintly. "But you can't wish away Benedict's murder, and in any case you'll have to submit to police questioning. Where have you seen this knife before?"

Dullman said reluctantly, "I don't even know if it's the same one."

"Granted. But where did you see one like it?"

"In that metal tool chest just outside. It was a big-bladed knife with a black-taped handle. From the look of this one I'd say they're the same—but I can't swear to it."

"When did you see it last?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I didn't see it 'last.' I saw it once. It was after the first act curtain. Benedict had weakened one of the legs of the set couch with his damfool gymnastics during that scene with the Truslow girl, and even the stage crew was demoralized. So I decided to fix the leg myself. I went for tools, and that's when I spotted the knife. It was lying on the top tray of the chest in plain sight."

"Did you notice any peculiar-looking indentations in the tape?"

"Indentations?"

"Impressions. Come here, Dullman. But don't touch it."

Dullman looked and shook his head. "I didn't see anything like that. I'm sure I'd have noticed. I remember thinking how shiny and new-looking the tape was."

"How soon after the curtain came down was this?"

"Was what?"

"When you saw the knife in the chest."

"Right after. Benedict was just coming offstage. He went into the dressing room here while I was poking around in the tools."

"He was alone?"

"He was alone."

"Did you talk to him?"

Dullman examined the pulpy end of his cigar. "You might say he talked to me."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he explained—with one of those famous stage leers of his—exactly what his plans were for after the performance. Spelled it out," Dullman said, jamming the cigar back in his mouth.

"And you said to him—?"

"Nothing. Look, Queen, if I went after every bum and slob I've had to deal with in show business I'd have more notches to my account than Dan'l Boone." Dullman grinned. "Anyway, you and the doctor here say you heard who Benedict put the finger on. So why cross-examine me?"

"Who occupies the dressing room just above this one?"

"Joan Truslow."

Ellery went out.

The lid of the chest marked *Tools* was open, as he had seen it on his backstage tour early in the evening. There was no knife in the tray, or anywhere else in the chest. If Dullman was telling the truth, the knife in Foster Benedict's back almost certainly had come from this tool chest.

Ellery heard two sirens coming on fast outside.

He glanced up at the narrow landing. The upper dressing room door was halfway open.

He sprang to the iron ladder.

ACT II. Scene 3.

He knocked and stepped into Joan Truslow's tiny dressing room at once, shutting the door behind him.

Joan and Roger jumped apart. Tears had left a clownish design in the girl's make-up.

Ellery set his back against the door.

"Do you make a habit of barging into ladies' dressing rooms?" Roger said truculently.

"No one seems to approve of me tonight," Ellery complained. "Rodge, there's not much time."

"For what?"

But Joan put her hand on Roger's arm. "How is he, Mr. Queen?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Benedict? Oh, he died."

Ellery studied her reaction carefully. It told him nothing.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Even though he was beastly."

"I saw his lips moving during your speeches in that couch scene. What was he saying to you, Joan?"

"Vile things. I can't repeat them."

"The police just got here."

She betrayed herself by the manner in which she turned away and sat down at her dressing table to begin repairing her make-up. The trivial routine was like a skillful bit of stage business, in which the effect of naturalness was produced by the most carefully thought-out artifice.

"Anyway, what are people supposed to do, go into mourning?" Roger sounded as if he had been following a separate train of thought. "He was a dirty old goat. If ever anyone asked for it, he did."

Ellery kept watching Joan's reflection in the mirror. "You know, Rodge, that's very much like a remark Stanley made a few minutes ago. It rather surprises me. Granted Benedict's outrageous behavior tonight, it was hardly sufficient reason to stick a knife in his back. Wouldn't you say?" The lipstick in Joan's fingers kept flying. "Or—on second thought—does either of you know of a sufficient reason? On the part of anyone?"

"How could we know a thing like that?"

"Speak for yourself, Rodge," Ellery smiled. "How about you, Joan?"

She murmured, "Me?" and shook her head at herself.

"Well." Ellery pushed away from the door. "Oh, Roger, last night in Arch Dullman's room, when Benedict was first mentioned as a substitute for Manson, I got the impression you knew Benedict from somewhere. Was I imaging things?"

"I can't help your impressions."

"Then you never met him before tonight?"

"I knew his smelly reputation."

"That's not what the lawyers call a responsive answer," Ellery said coldly.

Roger glared. "Are you accusing me of Benedict's murder?"

"Are you afraid I may have cause to?"

"You'd better get out of here!"

"Unfortunately, you won't be able to take that attitude with the police."

"Get out!"

Ellery shrugged as part of his own act. He had baited Roger to catch Joan off-guard. And he had caught her. She had continued her elaborate toilet at the mirror as if they were discussing the weather. His hostile exchange with Roger should have made her show some sign of alarm, or anxiety, or at least interest.

He left gloomily.

He was not prepared for the police officer he found in charge below, despite a forewarning of long standing. On the retirement of Wrightsville's perennial Chief of Police, Dakin, the old Yankee had written Ellery about his successor.

"Selectmen brought in this Anselm Newby from Connhaven," Dakin had written, "where he was a police captain with a mighty good record. Newby's young and he's tough and as far as I know he's honest and he does know modern police methods. But he's maybe not as smart as he thinks.

"If you ever get to Wrightsville again, Ellery, better steer clear of him. I once told him about you and he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gives me a codfish look and says no New York wiseacre is ever going to mix into *his* department. It's a fact there ain't much to like about Anse."

Ellery had visualized Chief of Police Newby as a large man with muscles, a prominent jaw, and a Marine sergeant's voice. Instead, the man in the Chief's cap who turned to look him over when he was admitted to the dressing room was short and slight, almost delicately built.

"I was just going to send a man for you, Mr. Queen." Chief Newby's quiet voice was another surprise. "Where've you been?"

The quiet voice covered a sting; it was like the swish of a lazily brandished whip. But it was Newby's eyes that brought old Dakin's characterization into focus. They were of an inorganic blue, unfeeling as mineral.

"Talking to members of the company."

"Like Joan Truslow?"

Ellery thought very quickly. "Joan was one of them, Chief. I didn't mention Benedict's talking before he died, of course. But as long as we had to wait for you—"

"Mr. Queen," Newby said. "Let's understand each other right off. In Wrightsville a police investigation is run by one man. Me."

"To my knowledge it's never been run any other way."

"I've heard tell different."

"You've been misinformed. However, I've known and liked this town and its people for a long time. You can't stop me from keeping my eyes open in their interest and reaching my own conclusions. And broadcasting them, if necessary."

Anselm Newby stared at him. Ellery stared back.

"I've already talked to Dr. Farnham and Mr. Dullman," Newby said suddenly, and Ellery knew he had won a small victory. "You tell me your version."

Ellery gave him an unembroidered account. Newby listened without comment, interrupting only to acknowledge the arrival of the Coroner and issue orders to uniformed men coming in to report. Throughout Ellery's recital the Chief of Police kept an eye on a young technician who had been going over the room for fingerprints and was now taking photographs. Times had certainly changed in Wrightsville.

"Those words Benedict said, you heard them yourself?" the Chief asked when Ellery stopped. "This wasn't something Farnham heard and repeated to you?"

"We both heard them. I'm positive Dullman did, too, although he pretended he hadn't."

"Why would he do that?"

Ellery could not resist saying, "You want my *opinion*, Chief?"

The blue eyes sparked. But he merely said, "Please."

"Dullman is walking on eggs. This thing is the worst possible break for him. He wants no part of it."

"Why not?"

"Because to admit he heard Benedict's accusation would mean becoming an important witness in a sensational murder case. I don't think Dullman can stand the publicity."

"I thought show people live on publicity."

"Not Dullman. For an Actors' Equity member like Benedict or Manson to work in an amateur company, it has to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be a legitimately amateur operation from start to finish. Arch Dullman is an 'operator.' He makes an undercover deal with someone like Stanley Bluefield—desperate to run a successful amateur playhouse—in a set-up that otherwise satisfies Equity's strict specifications. Dullman delivers a name actor—one who's passé in the big time and who'll do anything for eating money—in return for taking over behind the scenes, with Bluefield fronting for him."

"What's Dullman get out of it?"

"He pockets most—or all—of the box office take," Ellery said. "If this deal with Bluefield became a matter of public record, Dullman might never represent a professional actor again."

"I see." Newby was watching his technician. "Well, that's very interesting, Mr. Queen. Now if you'll excuse me—"

Take that, Ellery thought. Aloud, he said, "Mind if I hang around?"

Newby said politely, "Suit yourself," and turned away.

The knife had been removed from Benedict's back and it was lying on the dressing table. It was a long, hefty hunting knife, its bloodstained blade honed to a wicked edge.

The Coroner grunted, "I'm through for now," and opened the door. Two ambulance men came in at his nod and took the body out. "I'll do the post mortem first thing in the morning."

"Could a woman have sunk the knife to the hilt?" Newby asked.

"Far's I can tell without an autopsy, it went into the heart without striking bone. If that's so, a kid could have done it." The Coroner left.

Newby walked over to the table. The technician was packing his gear. "Find any prints on the knife?"

"No, sir. It was either handled with a handkerchief or gloves or wiped off afterward. This plastic tape is pretty slick, Chief, anyway."

"What about prints elsewhere?"

"Some of Benedict's on the dressing table and on the make-up stuff, and a lot of someone else's, a man's."

"Those would be Manson's. No woman's prints?"

"No, sir. But about this knife. There are some queer marks on the handle."

"Marks?" Newby picked up the knife by the tip of the blade and scrutinized the haft. He seemed puzzled.

"There's some on the other side, too."

The Chief turned the knife over. "Any notion what made these, Bill?"

"Well, no, sir."

Newby studied the marks again. Without looking around he said, "Mr. Queen, did you happen to notice these marks?"

"Yes," Ellery said.

The Chief waited, as if for Ellery to go on. But Ellery did not go on. Newby's ears slowly reddened.

"We could send the knife up to the big lab in Connhaven," the young technician suggested.

"I know that, Bill! But suppose first we try to identify them on our own. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

Newby stalked out to the stage. Meekly, Ellery followed.

The little police chief's interrogation of the company was surgical. In short order he established that, between the lowering of the curtain on Act One and the discovery of the dying man, every member of the cast except Joan Truslow had either been in view of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

someone else or could otherwise prove an alibi. With equal economy he disposed of the stagehands.

He had long since released the audience. Now he sent the cast and the crew home.

On the emptying of the theater the curtain had been raised and the house lights turned off. Stanley Bluefield and Archer Dullman sat in gloom and silence, too. Each man an island, Ellery thought; and he wondered how good an explorer Anselm Newby really was. For the first time he sensed an impatience, almost an eagerness, in Newby.

"Well, gentlemen, it's getting late—"

"Chief." Stanley was lying back on the set couch, his lips parted, gazing up into the flies and managing to resemble an old lady after an exhausting day. "Are you intending to close me down?"

"No call for that, Mr. Bluefield. We'll just seal off that dressing room."

"Then I can go ahead with, say, rehearsals?"

"Better figure on the day after tomorrow. The Prosecutor's office will be all over the place till then."

Stanley struggled off the couch.

"Oh, one thing before you go, Mr. Bluefield. Did you see or hear anything tonight that might help us out?"

Stanley said, "I wasn't here," and trudged off the stage.

"You, Mr. Dullman?"

"I told you all I know, Chief." Dullman shifted the remains of his cigar to the other side of his mouth. "Is it all right with you if I go see what's with my client before somebody does a carving job on him?"

"Just don't leave town. And Mr. Dullman."

"What?"

"Don't talk about what Benedict said." When Dullman was gone, Newby said, "Well." He got up and made for the stage steps.

"Chief," Ellery said.

Newby paused.

"You don't have much of a case, you know."

The little policeman trotted down into the orchestra. He selected the aisle seat in the third row center and settled himself. Like a critic, Ellery thought. A critic who's already made up his mind.

"Gotch," Chief Newby called.

"Yes, sir."

"Get Miss Truslow."

ACT II. Scene 4.

Joan sailed out of the wings chin up. But all she saw was Ellery straddling a chair far upstage, and she began to look around uncertainly.

Roger yelled, "You down there—Newby!" and ran over to the footlights. "What's the idea keeping Miss Truslow a prisoner in her dressing room all this time?"

"Roger," Joan said.

"If you think you've got something on her, spit it out and I'll have a lawyer down here before it hits the floor!"

"Sit down, Miss Truslow," Newby's soft voice said from below. "You, too, Fowler."

Joan sat down immediately.

Whatever it was that Roger glimpsed in her violet eyes, it silenced him. He joined her on the couch, reached for her hand. She withdrew it.

Newby said, "Miss Truslow, when did you make your last stage exit?"

"At the end of my scene with Foster Benedict on the—on this couch."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How long before the act ended was that?"

"About ten minutes."

"Did you go right to your dressing room?"

"Yes."

"In doing that, you had to pass by the tool chest. Was it open?"

"The chest? I can't say. I didn't notice much of anything." Joan caught her hands in the act of twisting in her lap, and she stilled them. "I was badly upset. They must have told you what he—the way he carried on during our big scene."

"Yes. I hear he gave you a rough time." The little Chief sounded sympathetic. "But you did notice the tool chest later, Miss Truslow, didn't you?"

She looked up. "Later?"

"During intermission. After Benedict got to his dressing room."

Joan blinked into the lights. "But you don't understand, Chief Newby. I went straight to my dressing room and I stayed there. I was . . . frozen, I suppose is the word. I just sat asking myself how I was going to get through the rest of the play. It was all I could think of."

"While you were up there, did you hear anything going on in the room below? In Benedict's dressing room?"

"I don't remember hearing anything."

"When *did* you leave your dressing room, Miss Truslow?"

"When I heard all the commotion downstairs. After he was found."

"That was the first time, you say?"

"Yes."

Newby said suddenly, "Fowler, Queen found you with this girl. How come?"

"How come?" Roger snapped. "Why, somebody ran into the prop room to tell me something had happened to Benedict. I ran back with him and spotted Joan in the crowd around Benedict's doorway. I hauled her out of there and up to her dressing room so I could put my arms around her in privacy when she broke down, which she promptly did. Wasn't that sneaky of me?"

"Then that was the first time you saw her after she left the stage?"

"I couldn't get to her before, though God knows I wanted to. I was too tied up backstage—" Roger halted. "That was sneaky of *you*, Newby. And damn nasty, too! What are you trying to prove, anyway?"

"Miss Truslow, how well did you know Foster Benedict?"

Ellery saw Joan go stiff. "Know him?"

"Were you two acquainted? Ever see him before tonight?"

She said something.

"What? I couldn't hear that."

Joan cleared her throat. "No."

"Logan." A police officer jumped off the apron and darted to his Chief. Newby said something behind his hand. The man hurried up the aisle and out of the theater. "Miss Truslow, a witness says that when Benedict went into his dressing room the tool chest was open and a big knife with a taped handle was lying in the tray. I'll ask you again. Did you or didn't you leave your dressing room, climb down, go to the tool chest—"

"I didn't," Joan cried.

"—go to the tool chest, pick up the knife—"

"Hold it." Roger was on his feet. "You really want to know about that knife, Newby?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You have some information about it?"

"Definitely."

"What?"

"It's mine."

"Oh?" Newby sat waiting.

"I can prove it," Roger said quickly. "If you'll strip the tape off you'll find my initials machine-stamped into the haft. I've used it on hunting trips for years. I brought it to the theater just today. We'd bought some new guy-rope yesterday and I needed a sharp knife—"

"I know all about your ownership of the knife," Newby smiled. "The question isn't who owned the knife, or even who put it in the tool chest. It's who took it out of the chest and used it on Benedict. Now, Miss Truslow—"

"Excuse me," Ellery said. The Chief was startled into silence. "Roger, when did you tape the handle?"

"Tonight, after the play started. I'd used it in replacing a frayed guy-rope and I hadn't been able to keep a good grip on it because my hands were sweaty from the heat backstage. So I wound some electrician's tape around the haft in case I had to use it again in an emergency during the performance."

"When did you drop it into the chest?"

"Near the end of the act."

"I thought I'd made it clear, Mr. Queen!" The whiplash in the policeman's voice was no longer lazy. "Interrupt once more and out you go. And I mean it."

"Yes, Chief," Ellery murmured. "Sorry."

Newby was quiet. Then he said, "Now I want to be sure I've got this right, Miss Truslow. You claim you went from the stage straight to your dressing room, you stayed there all the time Benedict was being knifed in the room right under yours, you didn't hear a sound, you didn't come down till after Benedict was found dying, and at no time did you touch the knife. Is that it?"

"That's it." Joan jumped up. "No, Roger!" She walked steadily over to the footlights. "Now let me ask you a question, Chief Newby. Why are you treating me as if you've decided I killed Foster Benedict?"

"Didn't you?" Newby asked.

"I did *not* kill him!"

"Somebody said you did."

Joan peered and blinked through the glare in her eyes. "But that's not possible. It isn't true. I can't imagine anyone making up a story like that about me. Who said it?"

"Benedict, in the presence of witnesses, a few seconds before he died."

Joan said something unintelligible. Newby and Ellery sprang to their feet. But Roger was closest, and he caught her just as her legs gave way.

(*Continued on page 129*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bindle (short for Bindlestiff) is all sponge and a mooch wide. He makes his pitch every Friday in Katzie's Saloon, but this week a terrible emergency has reared its head—which leads to a hilarious upshoot . . . "Button, button, who's got the button?"

THE PLANTING OF COUSIN CURLY

by ARTHUR MOORE

I AM SITTING IN KATZIE'S SALOON with the morning paper propped up in front of me, and for once I ain't figuring weights and past performances. I am looking at a picture of a missile down at that place in Florida. I am thinking that the government is getting tired giving away our scratch, now they are shooting it up in the air. The paper says them shots cost us a million bucks or so each time some egghead lights the fuse—and I ain't even got the moo for one lousy two-dollar bet.

While I am musing like this I feel a shadow, and when I turn my head Bindle Moran gives me his watered-down smile. Bindle is short for Bindlestiff; and when Bindle is stiff, he is the stiffest bundle on the block. Only today he is stone, cold sober.

"Albert," he says, "you have always been a right gee."

"I am flat," I tell him right off the bat. "I am flatter than the feet of a wooden Indian with fallen arches. And besides, ain't you workin' the wrong side of the street? You ain't due here till Friday."

"This here's a special occasion. A terrible emergency has arose."

"You ain't that thirsty?"

"I don't mind an old friend like you havin' your joke, Albert, on account of you have a good heart—which you have showed over the years when the road was rocky."

Bindle sits down and looks at me with them big brown eyes almost brimming over. He has learned how to sad-eye a mark through forty years of practice. His stringy hair is parted in the middle like someone who has just got off the boat. There are big furrows down the sides of his cheeks, so the tears should drain off better. Bindle's expression is his best asset; he has been refining it so long it is sorrow itself.

I try to signal Jonesy who is behind the bar, but he is pretending that fascinating things are happening outside on the street. The front windows haven't been washed in ten years and Lady Godiva could be changing horses out there for the next lap without Jonesy spotting the scene.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I give up and fall back on my only defense—poverty.

"You're wastin' the pitch, Bindle," I tell him. "I have got the flats. My leather is so thin it is takin' vitamins."

"We has our ups and downs. Maybe later you will be up. Anyway, it ain't for me I am askin', but for my Cousin Curly."

"Cousin Curly? The one who was sellin' war surplus hand grenades to high school kids?"

"It wasn't hand grenades," Bindle says real patient, "and anyway that was Fred. Curly was at sea. He worked on a sand dredge."

"That's nice. When I want some sand dredged, I'll look him up."

"Nobody will, not any more," Bindle moans. "He has gone to that last great sand scoop in the sky. Cousin Curly has departed this life due to a honest mistake. Somebody moved the gangplank when he was ashore gettin' load—er—on business."

"I got nothin' but admiration for men who go down to the sea in sand dredges, Bindle, but why me? I never torpedoed him."

Bindle sighs. He stands about sixteen hands high and is careful to keep himself thin as a jockey with double pneumonia. He has been wearing the same suit since Silent Cal was snoozing in the White House. It is so threadbare that moths can no longer find a foothold in it. He buttons his shirt at the neck just under his scrawny Adam's apple because he does not own a tie.

"He was my favorite cousin, Albert, and I am askin', not for myself, but for his memory. I am tryin' to scrape together the necessary scratch for a casket."

I settle back. "Go on."

"That's all. Cousin Curly was dear to me and I have got to see he is planted proper."

"That's all?" I am astonished. I am also hurt that Bindle would unwrap such an unconvincing cut of baloney—to attempt to part me from solid moo with a flimsy fleece and no dressing.

"You are goin' to lose your professional standing, Bindle, with a load of frog feathers like that. You could at least fancy it up so that Cousin Curly was loot-logged and you are needin' a bundle to get to the place where the will was bein' read."

"You wrong me, Albert. Cousin Curly was a poor man—poor and God-fearin'. A man who long ago showed me the right path. A man who—"

"APO," I say. "Ain't puttin' out. Not for no sea chantey which ain't even got a second chorus."

I am thinking that if Cousin Curly showed Bindle the way, it will take a casket the shape of a corkscrew to bury him—if there was a Cousin Curly in the first place. I would not say that Bindle is dishonest, but if I owned Central Park, I would count the trees every morning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Cousin Curly wished to be buried at sea," he says sadly. "Unfortunately this is outa the question. There is a plot waitin' for him at Evergreen Acres and we will put a coupla clam shells at his feet."

"No sale, Bindle. Me and lucre has parted friends. We are still speakin', but not very loud. I am hopin' to close the gap between us, but nothin' has come down the homestretch today. That's my story, and if you want my advice, you will take yours out and drop it in the river."

"You don't believe me," he says, like he is fighting heartburn. Standing up, he brushes his antique suit with a handkerchief, so he shouldn't tear it. "Thank you anyways, Albert." He smiles bravely though his heart is heavy. "Cousin Curly is now on ice at Tortini's Mortuary. I am askin' you for old times' sake to come with me and have a look."

"No, thanks, Bindle, but no hard feelings. I will cross your palm with scratch of the realm on Friday, but I ain't buyin' any extra squeeze today."

Bindle shakes his head at me like I have got more Scrooge blood in me than Old Scrooge himself. He wheezes and shuffles out to the street without another word. I watch him go, stepping careful, so as not to puncture the cardboard inside his shoes. He is all sponge and a mooch wide.

I am picking up the paper to study this missile thing again when Cornball comes stamping in. He orders a glass of milk from Jonesy and brings it over to my table. Cornball is a weightlifter whose real name is Cornwall Prouty, a moniker which even Cornball resents. He monkeys with the weights for muscle, but his pay streak is running alky.

"Ain't it shameful about Bindle's cousin?" he asks.

"It is as shameful as a deacon shootin' craps," I say, watching him sip the by-product of the cow. "Did he give you the pitch?"

"I thought it was Friday." Cornball sighs and pushes off his shoes. I don't bother to look under the table, but I know that he is exercising his toes. He makes every minute count. "Only there is something fishy about that story of his. I can't put my finger on it."

"It ain't got any character."

"Yeah, that's it. It sounds true."

"You ain't been drinkin' your own booze?"

"Hell, no," says Cornball huffily. "What you take me for?" Cornball is a very bulky specimen. He is beefy all over including between the ears. He has round blue eyes under a crew-cut and has no equals if there is biceps to be bulged; but he has a high, squeaky voice and wouldn't talk back to Little Red Riding Hood.

"Bindle is slippin' his cogs," I explain. "This happens to successful types who has got geetus in the mattress. He is tryin' to get by with uncooked material. That story is so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weak there ain't any other explanation. Bindle has give up work."

"But he's workin' overtime. This ain't Friday."

I reflect that this is true, so I change the subject. "What's new in the moonshine dodge?"

"Headaches," says Cornball, finishing the pasture product. "Gettin' the customers is easy, but runnin' the stuff across the river is strictly murder."

"That don't sound like no problem. Move the still to town."

"Impossible." Cornball shakes his square head and frowns at the empty glass. He motions at Jonesy for more cow juice. "We got a sizable investment in Jersey, and besides the mayor of this burg where the still is located would raise a stink. He's part owner."

"Can't you pay off the fuzz?"

Cornball looks wise. "Albert, you get mixed in with them legit types and you're gonna end up with a busted noggin. They want too much. Right now we are using ice cream trucks, which is fine for the summer, but winter is comin' on."

"You're right. Even cops is liable to get suspicious of ice cream trucks in the snow. What's your plan?"

"I ain't got any." Cornball sips the bovine extract and stares into space. I go back to reading the newspaper story that some clown has wrote, telling me how sorry I am gonna be if we don't hit the moon first with one of them missiles. I can't figure how he knows what I feel. I get up to go put the moor problem in front of Jonesy wher there's a commotion at the back door.

Jonesy goes rushing out, so me and Cornball follow. I hear Jonesy yell, "A stiff!" and then him anc Bindle come in from the alley.

"All I wanta do," Bindle says "is put him on ice in the back room I have gotta prove that I got a Cou sin Curly."

"I got beer cans in that ice," Jonesy yells, twitching his mustache.

"He ain't gonna hurt the beer. Anyway, he's pretty cold now, so you can put him on top of the beer and it'll keep the cans froze from both sides."

I look at Cornball who would be the first to line up with that kind of reasoning, but he is looking at something else, and has got a silly sort of expression that is hard to define. Until I see Dolores.

I have seen her before but I didn't really study her. In Jonesy's back room she is hard to miss. She trails after Bindle from the alley and she is just as big and husky as Cornball. She is wearing a black dress and looks like a bouncer from the YWCA.

Cornball can't take his eyes off of her and I go over and listen to the argument. Bindle is in his best form and Jonesy is weakening. He beckons to me.

"What do you think, Albert?"

"Why not?" I say. "After all,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how many joints has got defunct gents in the icebox?"

"Only for a couple days," Bindle pleads. "All we gotta raise is eighty-seven bucks."

"That's a cut-rate price on the casket," Dolores says. She is up real close to Jonesy, squinting her eyes at him.

"You ain't gonna get a chance like this every day," I tell Jonesy, and Dolores comes over real close to me. I notice that she is so near-sighted she hasn't even seen Cornball yet, and he is right behind me.

"It ain't respectful to the departed," Jonesy protests, and then I know Bindle has won. When Jonesy falls back on respect, he is on uncertain ground. Bindle knows it too.

"Thank you, Jonesy." Bindle wrings his hand. "I'll never forget this, I won't even come in Friday." He points to the icebox. "You move the beer cans over, me and Dolores will get Cousin Curly."

He looks around for Dolores, but by now she has discovered Cornball. The two of them are standing nose to nose and Dolores is batting her eyes faster and faster. It is a touching scene, so I offer to move the beer if Jonesy will help Bindle.

After Cousin Curly is packed away with the beer, Bindle has no trouble touching Jonesy for a fin toward the casket. Bindle beams like a Russian with a new veto stamp and I even promise him the sawbuck I have put away for emergencies—like a hot tip on the bangtails. None of us feel like drinking beer, and Cornball is back on the milk.

He is sitting in a corner with Dolores. They are both leaning on the table nose to nose and every time Cornball leans back to drink the moo juice, she reaches for him to make sure he's still there.

Cornball says, "Just think, if Cousin Curly hadn't coiled his cable we might never have met."

"Ain't it the truth," Dolores remarks, kind of breathless. "When I got in the hearse today, I never knew somethin' wonderful was gonna happen."

"Hearse?" asks Cornball. "You got a hearse?"

"Sure, for dead folks. It's out back."

"Say, that's an idea," Cornball says. "Let's go look."

So that's how it happened Cornball started using the hearse to deliver his alky. He even got Dolores to do the driving. For this she wears a pair of glasses with lenses so thick she don't dare go out in the sun.

Bindle gets busy raising his mazuma. We got a deadline now—Cousin Curly won't last forever, even on ice. But Bindle coaxes a steady stream of prospects into the back room to prove that he is on the up and up, and the take hits seventy clams.

I pitch in to soften up Honker, the pool shark next door, which is not easy. Honker was once fooled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by a gent in a red suit and a white beard when he was a kid and he has never forgot it.

"I heard the Cousin Curly come-on," Honker says, "but I ain't buyin'. I think he borried the stiff to raise the price of a ducat to Florida."

"Listen, pal," I tell him. "It sounds funny because it is true. Bindle is a pro. When he is boostin' for feedbag purposes he has got a line that would wring tears from a cast-iron polar bear."

Honker is a little white-haired whiz who looks as innocent as a birthday cake. "This here is Bindle's masterpiece," he admits. "He has used the sure-fire weepers so long that no one will believe him if his story sounds like the McCoy. Now he has switched to the simples and every yardbird in town, includin' you, is shellin' out like they are reservin' tickets to the Second Coming."

"He didn't borry the stiff. I seen the records at Tortini's Mortuary. Besides, old Bindle is a victim of his own oratory. He cannot handle the truth. He makes it sound like a guy explainin' a black eye. This here is on the level, I tell you."

Honker snorts. "Next you're gonna tell me a mule won the Derby."

"Not unless I seen it. I felt the same way myself at first, but now I am a convert."

It takes me another hour to break through to Honker's wallet, but he still feels he has been wronged. There is something underhanded in Bindle telling the truth.

On the day set for the funeral I bum a suit from a waiter I know uptown, and Jonesy and Bindle agree that we will leave for Evergreen Acres at two o'clock in the afternoon. Jonesy has put on a tuxedo and a boiled shirt that is beginning to turn yellow, and Bindle has a black band around the sleeve of the antique suit.

"Cornball just called from Jersey," he says. "He's on his way. Dolores is out back with the hearse."

We have a round of beers and in a half hour Cornball shows up. He is driving an ice cream truck and is wearing a suit of tails that he borrowed from the mayor. He backs the truck up next to the hearse and opens the hatch.

"Just one thing," he says. "I have promised a new customer I will deliver a batch of alky first, and then we can go."

"It ain't right to hold up the funeral," Jonesy protests.

"Curly ain't in any hurry," Cornball remarks. "Come on, help me get the booze in the hearse."

"We already got Cousin Curly in the casket," Bindle says.

"Well, put him back on ice. I'll only be a coupla minutes."

I shrug at Jonesy, and Dolores puts on her glasses so she can find the back door. We transfer Cousin Curly to the icebox again while

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cornball loads the casket in the hearse with the alky cans.

He is just locking the door of the hearse when the prowl car drives into the alley.

This startles us considerable. I check back over my recent activities and decide I can stand a few questions. But Cornball is licking his lips.

"Fuzz," he whispers, and Dolores puts on her glasses once more.

The cops get out of the car. They are wrinkled, squat types with very suspicious eyes, and all they do is frown. They inspect the ice cream truck like it is a space vehicle and they have just seen it land. They frown at the hearse and one of them walks all the way around us. The other one, a beefy, red-faced cop says, "What's goin' on here?"

"We're just goin' to a funeral, officer," Bindle tells him.

"A funeral?"

"That's when someone dies," I say, "and you go to the cemetery to—"

"I know what a funeral is," the cop growls. He looks at us again, one by one. "So you're goin' to a funeral, huh?"

"That's why we got the hearse," Jonesy explains, and the cop gives him a very dirty look.

The second cop says, "They got a hearse and they're goin' to a funeral."

"That's right," I say. I am glad they got it straight finally.

"Where is this here funeral?" the first cop asks.

"At Evergreen Acres," Bindle smiles. "It's my Cousin Curly. He died."

"He died, huh?"

"Yes. We're gonna bury him."

"In the ground," I say.

The second cop says, "Hmmm," and both of them nod.

"All right," the beefy cop growls, "let's get on with it." He looks at Cornball, who is biting his lip, and leans on the fender of the prowl car.

"You mean right now?" Cornball has a quaver in his high voice.

"Right now," the cop tells him. "And we're goin' with you."

We make a three-car funeral procession. First the hearse with Cornball and Dolores; then Jonesy, Bindle, and me in Jonesy's heap; and then the prowl car with the cops.

Bindle has hired a preacher to say the last words at the grave, and four of Cousin Curly's friends from the sand dredge show up with flowers. All of us stand around the open grave with the casket while the preacher reads the service in a rising and falling voice. The two cops even take their hats off.

That's the way we bury the alky.

Cornball cries all the way through the service—even the cops was touched by this. Afterwards, the four sand dredgers shake everybody's hands and the preacher says a few words to Cornball who is practically being held up by Dolores.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We must be brave," the preacher says, "remembering that the Almighty has taken him to everlasting peace."

"Who?" asks Cornball.

The preacher is a little startled. "Cousin Curly."

"I never knew him," says Cornball, and Dolores leads him to the hearse.

Bindle is pretty quiet all the way back to Katzie's Saloon. Jonesy drives slow and careful like he is still under the spell of the words the preacher said. I am beginning to think they have both forgot that Cousin Curly is still in the icebox.

"We didn't really waste all them flowers," Bindle says at last. There is a determined note in his reedy voice. "This here was Cousin Curly's funeral, and even if he wasn't there, it don't matter. It was done real proper and it wasn't our fault."

Jonesy comes back to life about then. His little mustache quivers and there is a hysterical note in his voice. "But what're we gonna do now, Bindle? You got to get him outa there!"

"Relax," I tell Jonesy. "You can mail him somewheres."

"Where?" yells Jonesy, but Bindle shushes him.

"Tonight," he says, "we are gonna plant Cousin Curly where he's supposed to be. We paid for that there plot and I ain't gonna let no load of alky use up that gravestone."

Jonesy calms down then. "I got two shovels out back," he says. "We'll run him out to the cemetery soon as it gets dark."

I have to go along because Bindle ain't much help at the end of a clam gun. Jonesy closes the saloon when the moon comes up and we wrap Cousin Curly in a blanket and shove him in the trunk of the car. The cemetery is quiet as a race track in the middle of a snowstorm and we have no trouble digging up the casket.

I am all for leaving the alky behind but Bindle won't have no part of it. "In the first place," he says, "it ain't decent to leave it in the grave with Cousin Curly. In the second place, Cornball needs it and he has been true-blue. I am gonna take it back to the Mortuary for him."

So that's the way we do it. We put the cans of alky in the trunk and back seat of Jonesy's jalopy and we plant Cousin Curly real proper and fill in the dirt again. Jonesy is nervous as a cat with a four-foot tail and I am feeling like Boris Karloff.

We drop off Bindle and the booze at the back door of the Mortuary. "I got a key," he says. "There ain't nobody here, but I'll stick the alky inside. Anyway, I need a drink."

Me and Jonesy do too, and Jonesy sets 'em up when we reach the saloon. "I am glad to do this here for old Bindle," he sighs, "but never again. I was thinkin' all the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way back from the cemetery—what would we tell the cops if they stopped us and found that load of alky?"

Sometimes Jonesy shakes me up. "What if they stopped us on the way out there?" I ask. "You had a story figured for that one maybe?"

"Cripes," he says, and his eyes go wide. "I never thought of that!"

Which is like Jonesy. He never puts nothing away for the future and don't even know how to handicap a horse proper. Bindle has been putting the bite on him for as long as I can remember, once talking Jonesy out of a pair of sawbucks to the memory of John Wilkes Booth. Bindle told Jonesy that Booth's statue needed repairs.

We have raised our glasses numerous times when Cornball shows up. He comes in the back door and slumps over a stool. "Dolores," he says, "is a wonderful girl, but she is headstrong."

"She is strong all over," Jonesy remarks. "I could have told you that."

"We put the alky—" I begin, but Cornball cuts me off.

"She is a wonderful girl, but she is vain. When she drives without her cheaters it is like that game them Russians play."

"Roulette?"

"Yeah. It makes my ears ring for a hour."

"Your ears?" I ask.

"From her blowin' the horn alla time," he says. "I think she listens for the echo."

"What drivin'?" I ask. "She drove the hearse to the funeral and back, that's all."

Cornball nods. "Yeah, but she drove again tonight. It's her hearse." He motions to Jonesy. "Lemme have a glass of milk to steady my nerves. We just went out to the cemetery and dug up the alky."

"You what!" yells Jonesy.

"It was closer than Jersey," Cornball explains. "I had to make a delivery to Roxy Callahan's nite spot, and he ain't a guy to fool with."

Jonesy begins to stutter and Cornball stares at him.

"Wait a minute," I say. "You dug up the alky *tonight?*"

"Sure. Whassamatter? If you're worryin' about the casket, I'll get it back—"

"Roxy Callahan!" stutters Jonesy. He is shaking so much he knocks over Cornball's cow fluid.

"Cornball," I say very quiet, "you have just loused up the works. Bindle, Jonesy, and me dug up the alky and planted Cousin Curly—"

"What!"

"—and took the alky to the Mortuary. Ain't you been there?"

"I been on the phone in the corner drug store for a half hour," wails Cornball. "The mayor wants his tails back. You're kiddin' about the alky, ain't you?"

"It's true," mutters Jonesy, and Cornball begins to come unstuck.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Roxy'll kill me," he says, white-faced. "Roxy'll murder me. He already paid me for the alky. I ain't got a chance—" He begins to walk in a circle, and he is shaking all over.

"The alky's at the Mortuary," Jonesy tells him again, and finally Cornball comes out of the fog.

"I gotta make good," he yells and runs to the door. We can hear his feet pounding the sidewalk till the sound fades away in the distance. It is four blocks to the Mortuary; Cornball could have beat Man-o'-War in his prime.

"What'll we do if Roxy comes here lookin' for Cornball?" asks Jonesy. He is nervous as a bearded lady in the Women's Room.

"We could lay down on the floor. That way we won't have to fall down when he plugs us."

"Very funny," says Jonesy. He keeps looking at the front windows like he wishes he had washed 'em. "I think we better close up and go home."

"Good idea," I agree. I am not eager to meet Roxy or them two hoods he keeps around for laughs. Roxy always laughs when his hoods exercise their muscles.

Jonesy goes to lock the front door, and Dolores and Bindle come in. Dolores is laughing and Bindle is real loose-jointed. The way he is walking he will wear out his shoe cardboard quick. He is loaded.

"Where's Cornball?" Dolores asks right away. She puts her glasses on and stares around the saloon. "Cornball, honey?"

"He ain't here," Jonesy says. "He just left for the Mortuary."

"We ain't there," giggles Bindle. "We're here."

"Shut up," Dolores says. "Why'd he go there? We was to meet here."

"We got like crossed wires," I tell her. "You better sit down—it's gonna be a jolt."

"What is?" She comes over close to me and holds my lapel so I won't move out of sight.

"Well," I say, glancing at Jonesy. "We dug up the alky and planted Cousin Curly before you got there."

"I know that," she frowns. "Bindle told me."

Bindle slaps the bar in front of Jonesy. "Lemme have a quick one, Jonesy ole pal—we're just goin' to have to plant him all over again. We got him in the hearse."

"No, you ain't," Jonesy says. "He's at Roxy Callahan's."

Dolores tightens her hold on my lapel. She puts her nose close to mine and her eyelashes is gonna give me a case of windburn. "Roxy called after I dropped Cornball at the drug store," Dolores says, "so I went over and fixed it up. I give him the alky and took back Cousin Curly."

I am getting an awful suspicion. I try to fight off her hold but it ain't any use. "You got Cousin Curly in the hearse?"

"Where's the damn hearse now?" asks Jonesy in a hollow voice.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Parked in front of the Mortuary," says Bindle, but he is beginning to sober up quick.

"Then Cornball is on his way," I tell them. "He's gonna deliver Cousin Curly back to Roxy."

Nobody says nothing for a long time. Everybody stares at everybody else and there ain't a thing we can do.

Jonesy starts mopping the bar, only he don't know he is doing it, and Dolores walks up and down bumping into things and knocking over chairs. She don't even notice. Bindle has sense enough to get out of her way and I go over and sit in a corner to worry.

Roxy Callahan is the type who is allergic to bodies. For years the fuzz has been trying to catch him with one, and up to now he has been lucky. He is not gonna like it when Cornball keeps trying to deliver one to him.

All of us are still sitting on this blockbuster when Cornball walks in a half hour later. He is all smiles and in one piece. But he takes one look at the four of us and stops in his tracks.

"What happened?" he asks, like he is scared to hear the answer.

"Nothin' yet," I tell him, "but—"

"Cornball!" yells Dolores, running in his general direction. "Did you take the hearse back to Roxy's?"

Cornball reaches for her and nods at us because he is swallowing and can't talk.

"[illegible] the hearse," she screams. "We had it all fixed up and you unfixed it!"

Cornball don't say a thing. He don't stop to ask questions, just grabs her arm and runs for the door. But he don't make it. Roxy Callahan and his two hoods open the door and push him back in the room.

Roxy is dressed in a dark-blue suit like he is a gentleman. He has a face like the front end of a destroyer, only it is much redder. He grabs Cornball by the front of the shirt and his voice reminds me of a truck skidding on loose gravel.

"Who paid you?" demands Roxy, "to keep deliverin' me stiffs?"

"Nobody," quavers Cornball. "It's all a mistake, Roxy."

"I don't like guys who make them kind of mistakes," Roxy grates. "Was it Little Angelo?"

"I don't know no Angelo, big or little," Cornball stutters.

Dolores says, "We got mixed up, Mr. Roxy. Cornball was only tryin' to make good on the alky."

"Yeah, that's right," stammers Cornball. "First I thought you had Cousin Curly, then Dolores—"

"Who's Cousin Curly?"

"He was my cousin," says Bindle. "We been tryin' to bury him all day."

Roxy lets Cornball go and glares at all of us in turn. His hoods stand in the doorway and don't use hardly any face muscles. Roxy says real nasty, "We got the stiff outside in the panel truck. I'm givin' you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenny seconds to get him *out* and put my alky *in*." Then he looks at his watch.

All of us begin running. Cornball yells that the hearse is out back, and he and Jonesy both try to get out the door at the same time. Dolores runs for the panel truck and I am trying to catch up. We get the casket out the back end and put it on the sidewalk, and Dolores is so flustered she locks the truck door again.

I run in to get Roxy's keys when Jonesy and Cornball charge past me with the other casket and the alky. Cornball is yelling to hurry up and Roxy gets mad all over again because Dolores locked the door. He makes his hoods move people along the sidewalk who have stopped to gawk at the commotion, and he unlocks the door of the panel truck.

"You are through," he grates at Cornball. "You're bringin' me no more alky—never."

"But I'm makin' good, Roxy," pleads Cornball. "Ain't I makin' good?"

"I got no time for dumb plays like this," Roxy growls. He grabs Cornball's shirt again. "Next time I see you, I will have my boys cut your heart out and fry it." He pushes Cornball away. "Now get outa my sight."

One of the hoods runs Cornball into the saloon and slams the door behind him, and them and Roxy take off in the truck. We line up and sit on the casket, dripping wet. Dolores goes inside and we can hear her telling Cornball that everything's all right now.

"Come on," Jonesy says, "This here's been a long day. Let's get this coffin inside."

"We better put Cousin Curly back on the ice," Bindle worries. "We can plant him again tomorra night."

Cornball is sitting on the floor with Dolores mopping his forehead when Jonesy and me carry the casket past them to the back room. Bindle moves the beer cans and I see his antique suit is torn where he ducked under the table when Roxy began to yell.

"I ain't cut out for this kind of work," Jonesy says. "Bindle, you ain't comin' in here Friday or no other Friday."

"No need to get sore," Bindle moans. "We was only tryin' to do the right thing." He gets all the beer cans moved. "Open the lid, let's get him up on the ice."

Cornball limps out, hanging on to Dolores. He shakes his head at Jonesy. "It wasn't Bindle's fault. I—"

And then Dolores screams. I never thought a dame could scream so loud. She is looking at the casket. Bindle has raised the lid—we still have the alky.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a NEW story by AVRAM DAVIDSON

A new story by Avram Davidson: What has it come to mean? Judging by Mr. Davidson's earlier stories in EQMM, the unexpected and the unpredictable.

It might be a story set in Cyprus or in Kipling's India or in New York's East Side. It might be a story about archeology or West Indian magic or smuggling or a rundown hotel. It might be a story of laundrymen or the Borgias or juvenile gangs or a writers' and artists' colony.

But whatever the locale or theme, whoever the characters might be, certain things are *predictable: a meatiness and authenticity of detail and local color; an understanding of and compassion for people; an approach, an attitude, a tone that is "pure Davidson." For Avram Davidson is an "original," a craftsman whose work is truly "sui generis"—labels that relatively few writers are entitled to even in a generation . . .*

A QUIET ROOM WITH A VIEW

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

PRECISELY AT MIDNIGHT, AS ALWAYS, in a predestined order and immutable sequence, Mr. Stanley C. Richards was awakened to the tortures.

Midnight. The bells in the Cathedral began to toll—twelve strokes. At *one*, Mr. Richards awoke and was reminded of where he was (which meant he was also reminded of where he was not), sighed, gripped the covers.

At *three*, Mr. Nelson Stucker awoke, quite obviously *not* reminded of where he was or was not, and began to call the name of his dead wife.

At *seven*, Mr. Thomas Bigelow, snatched from slumber by the uncertain cries of Mr. Stucker, began to cough. He coughed whenever he was awake—long, slow, deep, ropy, phlegmy, chest-rattling coughs; during the day, as if ashamed, he preferred to keep out of earshot—at the far end of the garden, in the nearby park, in an unfrequented chapel in the Cathedral, even (in bad weather) in the basement; but at night, poor man, where could he go?

And at the stroke of *ten*, Mr. Amadeo Palumbo, jolted from dreams of the dank little fruit and vegetable store where he had been busy and happy for forty years, jolted into remembrance that not only the store but the very building

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been torn down to make room for a housing project which had no need for fruit and vegetable stores —Mr. Palumbo moaned out his woes and grief and loneliness in the language of his childhood. "Oh, Gesu-Mari'!" he keened. "Oh, San' Giussep', San' Giacom'!"

And so, by *twelve*, by the last stroke of the chimes, a stroke echoing infinitely in the clamoring darkness, the tortured pattern of the night was established forever.

The nights seemed to last forever, there in that room under the eaves of the old building full—overfull, in plain fact—of old men and old women.

Bedtime was at half-past ten, and at half-past ten the four old men in the attic room overlooking the air-shaft sank quickly enough into slumber, tired out by the fatigue of having lived through another day. But by midnight they were all near the surface again.

It wasn't, really, that the chimes were noisy or unpleasant. On the contrary, they were soft melodious chimes, world-famous, as was the Cathedral itself—to which the Alexandra Home for Aged Couples and Elderly Men was attached by some loose denominational ties. It wasn't, really, the chimes so much that awakened Mr. Stanley Richards, who had lived within sound of church bells before and could easily have slept through them. It was the sure awareness of what was yet to come that killed his slumbers at the sound of the first stroke.

It was Mr. Stucker who was unused to the sound of chimes. Mr. Stucker was very old indeed, and while he knew well enough in the daytime that he was a widower and had been one for many years, he forgot it in the night-time—forgot it again and again and again. Shallow sleep vexed by slight cause, he knew only that he was awakened to find himself not in the double bed in which most of the nights of his life had been passed. He found himself in a strange bed now, without the proper presence of his wife from whom he had not been parted for a single day or single night until parted by her death—death which he could not, or would not, remember in the darkness.

So—

Dong. Dong. Dong.

And—

"Henny?" called old Stucker. "Henny? Hen-ny?" And, finally frightened, louder and louder, "Henny, Henny!"

Thus awakening Mr. Bigelow, in the next bed, to his ungovernable and shameful coughing—coughing which only grew worse as he tried to stop it. Poor, coughing Mr. Bigelow! Where could he go and hide his cough in the cold and hostile night?

So, in a matter of seconds, Mr. Bigelow woke up old Amadeo—who knew on the instant exactly where *he* was, and where he was *not*, and why, and that he could never return

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—never!—to the nice cool basement store, with a coolness so good for the beautiful fruit, the lovely vegetables, and the sweet familiar smell of them, and the familiar customers whom he had served for more than a generation in the old neighborhood (faults and all) which had been —ah, fatal change of tense!—more than a home. His life—gone, gone forever—urbanly renewed into a giant complex of giant boxhouses, with no crowded streets, no saloons, no restaurants, no little candy stores, no pushcarts—and no basement fruit and vegetable store for Amadeo Palumbo.

"Oh, Gesu," he wept. "Oh, Santa Mari' . . ."

And so the cycle would go throughout the whole night. Mr. Richards was not bothered by chimes, he missed no wife, he had no cough, he mourned for no lost occupation or familiar home or place. He wanted only to sleep, and he could not sleep because his roommates could not let him.

"Wake up! Wake up there, Richards. You getting senile or something, falling asleep while people are talking to you?" Mr. Hammond shook him into wakefulness.

Mr. Richards snapped his head up. Smiled. "Sorry for that," he said.

"Not very polite, in my opinion," grumbled Mr. Hammond.

"Now, Harry—" his wife said.

"Don't you *Now*, *Harry* me, Alice!"

They were all in the sun parlor at the front of the first floor. Mrs. Hammond smiled over her knitting. Mr. and Mrs. Darling looked distressed. "Senile" was not a nice word at the Alexandra Home. Mr. Hammond grunted, creased his newspaper.

"That's a habit I got into many, many years ago," Mr. Richards began.

"What, falling asleep when people are talking to you?" Hammond wouldn't let go.

"No, taking cat naps. Many times we'd have to march all night through the jungle, and then, in the daytime, set one man on guard, and the rest of us would just fall down and curl up, sleep for oh not more than five or six minutes, then jump up and start marching again."

Mr. and Mrs. Darling stopped looking distressed and started looking interested. Mrs. Hammond paused in her knitting. Her husband unfolded his paper again and said, "Man writes here—as I was saying, Richards, before you fell *asleep* on me—man writes here—"

But Mr. Darling was evidently not interested in what a man wrote there. His eyes wider than before, he leaned forward and asked, "Was this when you were fighting the Bolivians in that Grand Shako War, Mr. Richards?"

Once again, firmly and loudly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rattling his paper, Mr. Hammond said, "Man writes here that—"

But Mr. Darling, even louder, said, "Hey, Mr. Richards? Fighting the Bolivians?"

With an apologetic smile to Mr. Hammond, who scowled, Mr. Richards said, "Well, point of order, Mr. Darling. In the Gran Chaco War I was fighting *with* the Bolivians. Against the Paraguayans. By that time the cat nap habit had been established for many years, far as I was concerned, and I taught it to my men. Nicaragua, fighting the bandit Sandino—Venezuela, trying to overthrow the tyrant Lopez—" He chuckled, as if reminded of something.

Mr. Darling, his face now bright with vicarious enjoyment, said, "Hey, Mr. Richards? What—?"

Asking the pardon of the ladies for telling a slightly improper story (the ladies at once assumed an expression both surprised and insistent), but reminding them that the Latin race had different customs from our own, Mr. Richards proceeded to inform them that Lopez, though never married, had had many children.

"Oh, for goodness sake!" said Mrs. Hammond.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Darling, a featureless, dumpy woman, though inoffensive enough; but Mrs. Hammond was a very good-looking person, her skin still firm and pink and her snow-white hair neatly set.

Tyrant though he was, Lopez was nevertheless in his own way a sort of what-you-might-call a gentleman, and he had legally acknowledged all his natural children (as the expression goes), and had them legitimatized. One day Colonel Lindbergh flew down to Venezuela and was met at the airport by President Lopez and a number of his children, who presented Colonel Lindbergh with a bouquet of flowers.

Lindbergh took the bouquet and asked, "Are they natural?"

And Lopez had replied, "Yes—but legitimate!"

Mr. Hammond snorted, amused despite himself. Mrs. Hammond laughed softly. Mrs. Darling sat absolutely impassive, while her husband smiled and awaited more, obviously not realizing that the anecdote was completed. So Mr. Richards explained, "Lindbergh meant, were the flowers natural flowers or artificial flowers. But Lopez, when he heard him say, 'Are they natural,' thought he was talking about the children; so . . ." Finally getting the point, Mr. Darling laughed and laughed and wiped his eyes.

"Well, well, you certainly have led an interesting life," he said. "How many wars you been *in*, anyway, might I ask?"

Mr. Richards smiled, shook his head. "I really couldn't say. Some of them weren't big enough to count as *wars*, I suppose—"

Mr. Darling started counting on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his fingers. "You were in the *First* Balkan War, I believe you said? Yes; and the *Second* Balkan War, too, right? Against those Turks—terrible people they must have been in those days. And the First World War, and the Chinese Revolution and helping the Polish fight for the independence from the Russians and—" He lost track and began to renumber his fingers.

Giving his newspaper one final slap before thrusting it into his pocket, Mr. Hammond said, "I suppose you call yourself a Soldier of Fortune?"

"Well, I—"

"Well, it seems to *me*—it seems to *me*, Richards—you were nothing more than just a plain hired killer!"

Mr. Darling's mouth went round. Mrs. Hammond cried, "*Harry*"

"A mercenary, a killer, that's all!"

"Harry, shame on you!"

Mr. Richards hesitated, but before he could speak, Mrs. Darling did. Her mind moved slowly, very slowly, and when a word or reference entered, it often took several minutes for the effect to become visible. "Mr. Richards," she said now, oblivious of her husband's shock, his friend's embarrassment, Mr. Hammond's anger or Mrs. Hammond's indignation, "I want to ask you something: did those Turkish men really have all those wives locked up in a harmen, like they say, or is that only a story? I would like to know."

His face clearing, Mr. Richards was ready to answer, but he was forestalled by the canny Mr. Hammond who said, "Chicken for dinner today."

Instantly forgetting all about every Turk who ever lived, about wives, harmens, and all, Mrs. Darling said, "Chicken for dinner?"

Pursing his lips and nodding deeply, Mr. Hammond said, "Yup. Chicken for dinner. A nice chicken thigh, hmm, Mrs. Darling?"

Eagerly and with animation she said, "Oh, yes, I always say that there is nothing like a chicken thigh because the back is too bony and the breast is too rich and the leg has all those grizzles on it and as for the wing—well, it has hardly anything on it; but the thigh—I always say the thigh is just right."

"Well, now, look here, Mr. Hammond," Mr. Richards began; but Mr. Hammond, who had been through this battle before, wasn't ready to retreat.

"Yes, you're absolutely right, Mrs. Darling," he said. "A nice chicken thigh with a brown crust on it and maybe some mashed potatoes on the side, eh? Wouldn't that just touch the spot?"

She had been listening and nodding and smiling; now she exclaimed, "Why, that's just what I always say, yes. A brown crust on it and mashed potatoes, why—Edgar always used to love the way I made my mashed potatoes, didn't you, Edgar? Edgar?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Edgar Darling reluctantly shifted his attention from Mr. Richards. Wars! Revolutions! Soldiers of Fortune! Latin Dictators with natural children! And then—right here and now—an insult! Still looking eagerly at his adventurous friend, he began to swivel around to face his wife. "Hey, Mabel? What—?"

"Didn't you used to love the way I made my mashed potatoes? Mr. Hammond was just saying, oh, a nice chicken thigh with a brown crust and some nice mashed potatoes would just touch the spot right now, and I was telling him how you used to love the way I made my mashed potatoes. The way I made them was," she explained to the smiling, interested Mr. Hammond, "after I mashed them I used to put in a little milk and a little *butter*-milk, too, and salt and pepper and a nice big lump of butter. Edgar used to say, You sure don't stint or skimp on the butter, do you, Mabel, and I'd say, No, I don't believe in it and meanwhile I'd be frying a nice onion chopped up fine and then I'd mix it all together and, oh, Edgar, he just *loved* it! Didn't you, Edgar? We had such a *nice* home," she added, her mood suddenly destroyed.

"The Turks—"

"An apple turnover is very nice," Mr. Hammond observed.

Old Mrs. Darling's mouth, which had begun to quiver, slowly began to smile. "Yes," she said. "I always say that a nice apple turnover is *very* nice, provided the *crust*," she said earnestly, "the *crust* is *flaky*, and the way to make a nice flaky crust is that you take—"

Later in the afternoon the sun was overcast and many of the residents who had been on the sun porch went into the lobby to sit near the coal fire or went into the music room to watch television. A number of people were taking naps in their rooms, among them Mr. Harry Hammond.

Mrs. Alice Hammond came into the lobby from the elevator and looked around. Stanley C. Richards was sitting at one end of a sofa, gazing at the play of colors among the glowing coals in the grate. He seemed depressed. She sat down next to him, and he looked up. He smiled, but only for an instant.

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Hammond. Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Richards. It's gotten quite misty out, I see."

"Yes. Yes. Quite misty," he agreed absently.

"Of course, now it's just making everything dark and dull outside, but this morning—were you up early this morning? Did you notice from your window how enchanting it was—the view of the Cathedral and the Park, with that very nice light mist over everything?"

He smiled, rather wryly, but again his smile did not last. "Afraid not, Mrs. Hammond. My window

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doesn't have a view of anything except the airshaft."

"Oh, that's a pity. We have such a lovely view, and it's so nice and quiet, too. Well . . . And I *am* sorry that I never got to hear your answer to Mrs. Darling's question about the Turkish women, either."

"In the harmen?"

"In the harmen."

Their eyes met, sharing the joke for a moment. Then she looked down, fumbled for her knitting, and said, "I'm afraid Harry wasn't very nice to you this morning. We had quite a quarrel about it—the biggest one we've had since the one we had about the cemetery. Do you know about that one?"

She was surprised he didn't—she thought everyone in the Home knew about it. Many members of Mrs. Hammond's family and many of her friends were buried in Greenlawn Cemetery. It was quite a ride by public transportation, true, but there was a nice clean coffee shop only a block from the grounds, where you could stop and have a cup of tea and a piece of cake.

And Greenlawn was so beautiful . . . Not that she wouldn't want to go if it weren't; that made no difference. Family was family, and friends were friends, and you didn't stop caring for them just because they were gone, did you? What harm was there in going once a month—or even once a week—to pay your respects? To take a few flowers, to find comfort in how nicely everything was kept, to say a little prayer from the heart—was there anything wrong in that?

"None that I can see, Mrs. Hammond."

"Nor I. But—Harry. He won't go, he just will not go, and he won't let *me* go, either. Oh, not that he ever says, 'I forbid you to go' or anything like that. But he gets so nasty, so unpleasant, and he carries on so whenever I so much as mention it that—well, much as I want to, I don't go. Not any more. And it's the same way about funerals. He won't go. Last month a very old and dear friend of ours passed on. We were indebted to her for many kindnesses. And she had asked me to take charge of the funeral arrangements—that is, everything was paid for—things like the flowers and the hymns and the guest list and things like that.

"I don't mind saying that in the past I did take care of such arrangements for the funerals of various friends and relatives—I liked to see that everything was carried out nicely. It's the last thing, almost, that you *can* do, you know. But Harry wouldn't let me. 'Jenny asked me to, Harry,' I said. 'She was your friend too. Who else helped you with those Liberty Bonds, and took such a loss, too, if not Jenny?' I asked him. But he said she wouldn't know the difference and he got so angry he worked himself into one of his attacks and so of course I couldn't take care of any arrange-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments and so it was all left to strangers . . . I hope you don't mind my telling you all this?"

It was not often that Mr. Richards had occasion to talk to Mrs. Hammond alone, and he found that he enjoyed her company. Perhaps her current conversation was not the most cheerful imaginable, but it was appropriate for a person of a respectable age to think about. And certainly it was preferable to listening to endless monologues about gall bladders and mashed potatoes and the ingratitude of children or how old Mr. X had (supposedly) cheated old Mr. Y at checkers or what a fine woman the late Mrs. A, B, or C had been. No, Mr. Richards didn't mind.

And then she absolutely astonished him.

"Harry is so resentful about you," she said, "because your life is so much richer than his."

"What?" He was dumfounded.

"Oh, yes." Her clear blue eyes looked at him candidly. "You've been everywhere and you've done everything and he hasn't been anywhere and he hasn't done anything. He wouldn't have known what an adventure looked like. Harry spent all his life working for various linen importers. There is nothing duller in this world, believe me. So he has nothing to look back on and nothing to look forward to. That's why he is so angry when people would rather listen to you tell about your different military experiences fighting for Liberty in foreign countries than to hear him talk about what he read in the paper about the tariff. And I hope you'll forgive him for that terrible thing he said to you this morning."

No better than a killer . . .

After Mrs. Hammond had left, reluctantly, to visit ancient Mrs. Hannivan, the Home's only centenarian, who was in her room and feeling poorly and had asked especially for Mrs. Hammond—after she had left, a thought occurred to Mr. Richards which was very attractive to him: namely, that Mr. Harry Hammond wasn't the only one who could take a nap. Stanley C. Richards could take one, too, if he liked, and at the moment he liked to very much. He got up and went to the elevator.

He felt very tired. Last night his roommates had been even noisier than usual; tonight might be no better. There was no possibility of finding another room—there simply were no vacancies (as Mrs. Fisher, the Home's director, pointed out when he spoke to her). And as for any of the single men in the other rooms changing with him—why should any of them be so foolish? They knew very well why he wanted to swap. The only possibility was if one of them should die. Old Tom Scorby had a bad heart. Mr. Kinglsey could barely shuffle one foot ahead of the other. Mr. Manning—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stanley C. Richards reproached himself for such a gruesome notion. The elevator got to the top floor (hottest in summer, coldest in winter) and he went to his room. He almost smiled in anticipation of his waiting bed as he opened the door.

But someone was sitting on his bed.

Mr. Harry Hammond.

Mr. Hammond started, jumped a little bit, on seeing him. His expression had been pensive, but now he smiled.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Mr. Richards.

"You think so? Glad you think so." Hammond chuckled. "Just my little joke. Don't mind me."

Mr. Richards said he wouldn't, only—"I was planning to take a nap, and you're sitting on my bed."

Elaborately, his guest rose, walked over to the nearest chair, waved Richards to the vacated bed. "But before you go to sleep," he said, "I have an apology to make. Yes, sir," he said contentedly, "I did you wrong this morning. What I called you, I mean. I take it back. I take it all back, Richards, every bit of it."

Mr. Richards sat down slowly on his bed and looked at his tormentor. After a moment he said, "Thank you."

Mr. Hammond waved his hand, widened his smile. "I would like to get some information. I'm sure you can tell me. You tell everybody a lot of—well, a lot of things. You've been telling it to us for—oh, eight years now, isn't it? That you've been here? Yes, eight years. I admire the way you talk—your command of the language. It just flows out of you, you're so eloquent. You're a regular Old Man Eloquent, aren't you?"

Mr. Richards was puzzled, not so much by his guest's manner which was plainly hostile, but by his purpose. "I didn't get much sleep last night," he said. "What was the information you wanted?"

"Which side were you on," Mr. Hammond asked carefully, "in the First Balkan War, if I might inquire?"

"The Greek side. Why?"

"When was this? The First Balkan War, I mean?"

Mr. Richards frowned. "Oh . . . 1912, 1913. Shortly before the First World War. Why do—"

"And you were in the Second Balkan War, and the First World War, and the Polish-Russian War, *and* various Chinese Revolutions, *and* all those different Latin American Revolutions, and—*oh*, yes!—let us not forget that Gran Chaco War between Bolivia and Uruguay in—"

"Paraguay—"

"Paraguay, sorry. In—?"

"The Thirties sometime. Frankly, I don't remember exactly any more. I could look it up for you. What's all this about, Mr. Hammond?"

In a low, intense voice, as filled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with hate and venom as was his face, Mr. Hammond said, "You're a liar."

Richards got up. "I don't know what you want out of me," he said. "I think you're a pretty lucky fellow. You've got a lovely, intelligent wife. You've got a nice big room all to yourselves, a quiet room with a view, where it's peaceful at night. I've got nobody. What—"

"You don't deserve to have anybody. You're a liar. Spent twenty-five years as a soldier of fortune all over the world, did you? Did you? Why, you—"

"Get out of here, Mr. Hammond."

Scrambling to his feet, Mr. Hammond headed for the door, his face scowling. He turned around and said, "But I'll fix you! I'll show you up for the bluffer and the fourflusher you are!" He took something from his pocket, held it up. It was a watch. "You left this in the downstairs Men's Room when you washed your hands for lunch. And I found it!" He dangled it triumphantly.

It was too far away to be seen clearly in the dwindling light. But its owner did not have to see it clearly to know what was engraved on the back . . .

Mr. Hammond had left, was punching the elevator button in the hall, but his parting words still rang in Mr. Richards' ears: "Wait till they see this! Wait—"

Another voice came faintly up the shaft. "Can't take you now, we've got the food carts to take care of." The sick and bedridden were being served their suppers earlier than the other residents, as usual.

Mr. Hammond's feet went slap-slap-slapping toward the stairs. Suddenly Mr. Richards ran out, ran after him. Hammond turned around, his face becoming defiant.

Richards grabbed for the watch, but Hammond quickly pulled away his hand. For a few seconds they stood there, face to face. Many thoughts ran through Mr. Richards' mind. Then he came to a decision. With one abrupt and utterly effective movement, he pushed Mr. Hammond down the stairs.

Mr. Hammond fell down, fell forward, his mouth open on a long, long sound which never became a word. He landed with a dull noise, and continued falling, limbs quite loose, stair after stair, until he rolled to a stop at the bottom of the landing.

Mr. Richards was right after him. The watch was still ticking. As Mr. Richards looked almost incuriously at the dead man's face, he had time for a brief reflection.

Naturally, it would be a shock to Mrs. Hammond. But her bereavement would not be without compensations. She would not have to put up with Harry Hammond's selfishness and vile temper any longer. There would be a funeral, and she could make all the arrangements to her heart's content—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flowers, hymns, guest lists, everything.

And henceforth she could visit Greenlawn Cemetery as often as she liked. There would be one more grave to which she could bring flowers and see that everything was nicely cared for, one more well-kept grave over which she could say a little prayer. And then, afterward, have a cup of tea in the nice clean coffee shop nearby.

Of course, there was bound to be a certain amount of loneliness at first. She would feel it, she was bound to, particularly when she was by herself in the Hammond double room—the one with the lovely view. The nice quiet one, where no old men cried out, no old men coughed forever, no old men moaned aloud the whole sleepless night through.

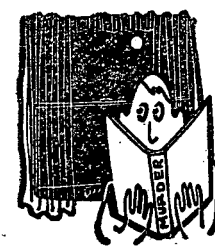
Moving very quickly, Mr. Richards swept up the watch and put it in his pocket. Later, he would have the back replaced. It would not do—it would never, never do—to have anyone else see the words engraved there, words he knew by heart.

Half a Century of Faithful Service
1900—1950
Stanley Carl Richards
Accounting Dep't, Walton & Co.

Mr. Richards lifted his head. "Help!" he shouted. "Help! Somebody get a doctor, quick! Mr. Hammond fell down the stairs!"

Feet came running, voices were loud, but Mr. Richards scarcely heard them. What would a proper interval of time be? Three months? Six? He would let events take their course.

Now that he was sure, he could be patient. It would not be long. She would be lonely all by herself in that pleasant double room, that quiet room with a view. He knew, already, what his opening words would be. "Mrs. Hammond—Alice." That was a nice name. It fitted her. "Alice—do you think you could bring yourself to marry a killer?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 267th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . We regret that we cannot tell you anything about the author—no details of his or her age, background, vocation, avocations, hobbies, or ambitions. All our inquiries, direct and indirect, have gone unanswered. This has happened before with new writers having their "baptism in print" in EQMM, and as in previous instances, we are sure there are good reasons.

This "first story" shows considerable promise. The author has an instinctive feeling for suspense and terror, and he (or she) gets into the skin of the main character. It will be interesting to see what this new writer produces next . . .

MAN IN A WHEEL CHAIR

by M. J. KELLY

THE BIG WHITE HOUSE STOOD ON the corner where Channing Street and Wilmot Avenue crossed. By day it was a pleasant place, set in the quiet dignity of a wide lawn and uncrowded by other homes. By night it was impressive. The newly installed street light threw a greenish light along one side of the house, accentuating the long shadows enveloping the spacious, turn-of-the-century structure.

The mercury light pushing through the blinds threw a slatted pattern of light and shadow across the floor of the large master bedroom on the second floor. On the darker side of the room the antique bed creaked. James E. Power, master of the house, could not sleep. He pitched back and forth with that peculiar shoulder roll characteristic of those who have lost the use of their lower limbs.

Twisting from side to side, fighting with his pillow, James Power sought vainly to recapture the light doze from which he had awakened. Finally, deciding it was useless, he opened his eyes, glanced at his watch, then lay staring at the dark ceiling. He noted that his stomach was churning and complaining noisily. He thought about a glass of milk. It would help.

He thought about it for a few moments, then cursed himself for a stubborn old man. To drag himself out of bed and into his wheel chair, to roll to the head of the stairs,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to struggle onto the elevator seat, and then to dump himself into the wheel chair parked at the foot of the stairs . . . it was a higher price than he was prepared to pay—even if his belly was complaining, even if the milk would taste good.

Cursing his stubbornness again, he settled for a cigarette. He fished one out of the pack on the bedside stand. A glint of light reflected from his lighter and he put his hand on it without fumbling. A half dozen useless clicks set him to swearing again.

A search through the night stand produced no matches, so he sighed, grabbed the overhead bar, and hoisted himself over and into the waiting chair. Dragging his robe off the foot of the bed, he wriggled into it, and rolled over to the bureau. Grabbing the can of fluid and ignoring the semidarkness of the room, he gave the cotton-filled chamber of the lighter a couple of squirts.

Refueled, the lighter worked fine. He lit a cigarette and took a long draw. Exhaling, he twisted his lips into a wry smile as he thought about Dr. Dixon's efforts to get him to stop smoking. He remembered the last instance of Dixon's oft-repeated admonition.

"Jim, you'd better get off those things. You know they're hard on that chest of yours. I can't be responsible if you keep on gulping down all that mess. You must smoke three packs a day."

"Only two and a half," he'd snorted. "And less than that when I'm out catching eighteen holes." The bitterness occasionally cropped out even after all these years.

Dr. Dixon just looked at him.

"What do you expect a man to do who has all day long to sit around and twiddle his thumbs?"

"I'm warning you, Jim."

"For a change?"

"Have it your own way."

The arguments always ended on the same note: Jim's stubbornness and Dixon's friendly disgust. It was more than a doctor-patient relationship. They had shared some bad moments over the years. They were friends.

For all his refusals, James Power often thought of his doctor's advice. He knew he smoked too much—the tight chest and the tired cough proved that. He knew he ought to stop. At times he even considered stopping. But the very thought made him fidgety. Tonight, as usual, he dismissed the idea in a cloud of smoke, deciding only to keep the lighter fluid handier. Slipping fluid and lighter into his pocket he rolled over to the window.

Adjusting the pitch of the blinds, he looked out at the quiet corner bathed in the soft, not quite white light from the pole across the street. He had sat there many a night when sleep wouldn't come. But tonight was different. Tonight he was alone in the big house and terribly aware of his aloneness.

If I hadn't been so damned proud, I wouldn't be by myself. He remem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bered the lie he had told and regretted it. *Just the trick a stupid, stubborn, old jackass like me would pull!*

A car pulled up Channing Street, stopped, turned left down Wilmot, and slipped out of sight. The idea of people out moving, maybe heading home to a family, increased his sense of isolation.

Pete was like a member of the family.

He caught himself and muttered aloud, "Pete is the very last person I want to sit here and think about!" But he couldn't help himself. It all seemed so strange, so unnecessarily tragic. It was because of what happened that he was so miserably aware of the creaking emptiness in this large dark house.

He remembered the day Pete had come by asking for the job. He was a hulking man just out of the Navy with a medical discharge. Shy and slow to speak, he had reminded Power of some big affectionate dog who wanted to be friendly but didn't know how to begin. Something in the old man's heart had responded and he had hired Pete on a trial basis.

After a series of unsatisfactory male domestics, the ex-Navy cook had been like a dream come true. Not only could he cook, he also cleaned, did the shopping, made minor repairs, and generally saw to the management of the house. So anxious to please, so appreciative of any praise, he had waited on his new employer with eagerness and enthusiasm. But more than that, he was a companion.

Night after night they had sat together watching television or playing pinochle. Pete had no friends in town and except for an occasional visit to his brother in the country, he seemed content to spend not only his days but his nights sharing the old man's comfortable but limited life.

James Power thought about the nightly glass of milk and shook his head. It had become a ritual. Every night, no matter how late they stayed up, Pete would fiddle around in the kitchen until Power was settled in bed and then slip in with that glass of milk. "Just in case," he used to say with that slow, shy smile of his.

Funny how you miss a little thing like that, Power mused, *but, after all, Pete did it almost every night for nine years.*

He tried to shift his mind to another subject. But outside, nothing was stirring, and inside, there was the gnawing sense of loss that would not let up. The thing had caught him terribly off guard.

Pete always had a preoccupied look when he was not actually engaged in his stumbling efforts at conversation. So that—his look—passed by. And the thing about the knives: he had always insisted on keeping them sharp and clean, so it hadn't seemed peculiar in the beginning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But that night—Power shivered when he remembered it. That night, like tonight, he had been sitting at the window looking out. The sound had been almost imperceptible. He had turned to see Pete's shadowy form standing inside the doorway.

"Thought you had gone to bed, Pete. Hope I didn't wake you."

There had been no immediate response but that was not unusual with Pete. The first hint that anything was wrong came as Power lit a cigarette. In the flare of light Power had seen the gleam in Pete's hand.

He remembered rolling over to the bureau and clicking on the lamp. The knife in Pete's hand had startled him, but what had really dug in and twisted his intestines was the blank, glassy-eyed look on Pete's normally friendly face.

"What do you want, Pete? Are you sick?"

Pete had dropped his eyes until they met his employer's; then he had looked at the knife. Without a word he turned and left the room.

A phone call brought Pete's farmer brother over in less than an hour. It was only then that James Power learned the nature of Pete's medical discharge. His brother confessed that it was a mental upset but he vowed that the Navy psychiatrists had declared Pete well—at least, harmless.

Power had insisted on paying for Pete's conferences at the local psychiatric clinic. He tried to remember the terminology of the report. "Incipient paranoia although not perceived as acute . . . " Whatever that meant. The other, more homespun explanation had stuck longer.

The psychiatrist had said, "Pete somehow identified you with his father. The same feelings, therefore, that made him want to wait on you hand and foot also produced a resentment against the very thing he felt compelled to do. It's a very common reaction in certain parent-child relationships. Terrific ambivalence—love and hate mixed up together. I personally don't think he would have actually tried to kill you. But I'm not absolutely sure. Under the circumstances, it would be unwise for him to stay on with you."

Power knew what "under the circumstances" meant. It meant a helpless old man alone in a big house. So Pete went out to his brother's place in the country, and arrangements were made for him to receive outpatient treatment.

That had been two weeks ago. Since then, Power had managed miserably with the domestics the agency had sent over—that is, he had managed until this morning when the newest man had quit.

With no promise of an immediate replacement Power had called his nephew Jack to come over. But Jack had an important business conference scheduled and asked if one day later would be all right. Power had agreed and lied through his teeth about being able to get someone for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the night. He knew the agency had no one and he was too proud to call on one of his friends, so he had decided that he could make it alone for one night. Now he wished he hadn't.

After the departure of Pete his sense of isolation pressed down on him as it never had before. He was nervous, and his nervousness seemed almost to approach fear.

Don't be stupid, he argued with himself. *Same old house, same old street, same old long nights.*

He found himself thinking about the times Pete had lifted him like a baby into the car or out of the tub. *As gentle as a mother with a baby. What had made him change? Did I do something?*"

He shook his head as if to clear out the morbid thoughts and said aloud, "It's all over now. Tomorrow Jack will be here and we will just have to find a new man."

He lit another cigarette and sat staring out the window. When he saw the figure about a block away, moving down Wilmot, he was pleased. It was something to divert his mind. He wondered who would be out at such an hour.

He glanced at his watch and saw that it was past two o'clock. When the figure veered off at the corner and angled across Channing, it occurred to Power that it might be a motorist in trouble looking for a phone. Just as this thought ran through his mind, it dawned on him that there were no lights on in the house.

Then Power recognized the hulking form which had become so familiar to him over the years.

It seemed so natural to see Pete ambling across the lawn toward the side door that Power's emotional alarm system faltered for a moment. Recovering, it began to send tingling sensations up and down his spine. As his fear focused, his stomach gave a violent turn. Icy fingers squeezed his heart.

He's come back—this time to kill me!

There was no other explanation for the late-night visit. Pete must have slipped away from his brother and made his way into town. Now he was moving just under the window. And he was not ambling any more. There was something stealthy and determined in his movements.

Power sat frozen until the slight click of the side door brought his brain to racing activity. He wheeled and rolled back to the bed. His hands trembled as he picked up the receiver. He dialed the first digit and . . . He heard the dial tone go dead and give way to the sound of heavy breathing on the other end of the line.

"Pete."

Only the breathing.

"*Pete*," he pleaded.

Nothing but the sound of the receiver being set down—off the hook.

Any lingering doubts about why

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pete had come back were gone. Power's love for his former companion dissolved in the suddenly aroused urgency of self-preservation. The wheels moved over the familiar path to the large closet and inside. The bird gun that had not been used for so many years still stood in the corner. Power's trembling hands reached out. They found only the naked intersection of plaster.

Pete must have moved it or taken it away before he left.

A new wave of dizzying fear swept over him. To be trapped like this—helpless, defenseless . . . He felt his abdominal muscles straining in a vain effort to move his lifeless legs. Floundering in the mass of clothes hanging in the closet, Power searched for anything that might serve as a weapon. *He's even taken my golf clubs!*

James Power sat in the darkness of the closet opening and his hands ached for any solid object that would serve to help him. He thought of Pete's big strong hands—and the drawer full of knives. He heard the ticking of his watch and the pounding of his heart.

Gripping his wheels, he rolled away from the closet.

Damned if I'll die trapped in a black hole of a closet.

A mocking question echoed back through his tortured brain. *Where will you die?* Where in this old familiar room that had been so much of his life for so many years would Pete find him?

Rolling aimlessly in the large room James Power had never been so agonizingly aware of his helplessness. Everything in him screamed, *Run, get away, hurry, run!*

He stopped the aimless movement of the chair and gripped the wheels until the spokes cut into his hands. He wanted to throw himself out and drag his withered legs behind him until he could find some dark corner in which to hide. But he knew that it was no use. Pete had no need to hurry and he knew every inch of the house. *If I just hadn't picked up the phone, he might have thought . . . But I did. God help me, I'm trapped. I'm going to die.*

He found himself listening for the footsteps that would mean the end. But there was nothing except silence—heavy, oppressive silence throughout the house. He strained every nerve and listened. Nothing.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of metal on metal. It was a familiar sound. With no apparent haste, Pete was sharpening a knife. The thin, metallic scraping rang like a note of eerie reality in James Power's mind. Pete was not outside the door. There were a few moments left. The nightmare feeling of utter futility yielded to a fresh burst of determination—to fight or hide—anything but sit here and wait to die.

Quickly he tried the phone again. Dead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rolling over to the bureau, Power ransacked the drawers. Looking for nothing in particular, his trembling fingers groped for anything that might deliver him from utter defenselessness. His hands touched all the familiar things: a camera, boxes of unopened handkerchiefs, socks—all the things he knew would be there. But nothing else. His spinning brain traced the familiar details of the room. Nothing—nothing registered.

Then he thought of the flashlight in the bottom drawer of the bedstand. *Maybe I can blind him. Maybe . . .*

Finding the flashlight, he lifted his head and listened. There was no more scraping.

Pete is coming up.

Frantically, he rolled toward the door. *If I can get to the top of the stairs and shine the light down. Maybe . . .*

He found himself in the hall at the top of the stairs. He heard Pete's footfall on one of the bottom steps. A trembling thumb pressed down and forward. The weak yellow beam of the flashlight slid down through the darkness and picked up the glint of bright metal. Wavering, the beam rose and settled on Pete's face.

The blank look, the glazed eyes were just as he remembered them—only worse. They transformed the familiar countenance into a strange one. It was the face of terror and death coming toward him.

The dead eyes blinked at the light. The feet kept rising and falling on the steps. There was a horrible, inexorable quality to the movement—not hurried but not to be stopped.

They kept rising and falling. The eyes staring, the feet plodding, the knife glinting . . . More and more, Power's shaft of light wavered.

"Get away from here. Get away!" The shriek reverberated through the darkened hall, but the hulking figure seemed not to have heard it.

Irrational panic and desperation met in one wild frantic arc as Power hurled the metal tube toward the glazed eyes. It missed by six inches, bounced off the wall and down the stairs, and made a puddle of light on the landing. James Power sat trembling in the darkness. The sound of the heavy breathing came closer and closer.

Backing away, the old man angled toward the open bathroom door. Postponing the end, he rolled backward into the space between the toilet and the tub, slammed the door, and slid the bolt.

The footsteps came padding after him across the width of the hall.

Power stretched up and opened the medicine cabinet. He had once owned a straight razor. A bottle crashed to the floor and broke. No razor.

The doorknob turned.

Power ran his hands around the room. He remembered a "plumber's friend" that had once stood in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corner. His fingers found nothing sturdier than a toilet brush which rattled in its plastic stand.

"Pete. Please."

The doorknob stopped turning, but there was no answer.

"*Pete!*"

The old man wiped his sweaty palms on his robe. The downward thrust of his right hand was blocked by the lighter and the can of fluid still in his pocket. A crazy idea seized his brain.

Somehow the sound of his voice seemed to make Pete hesitate. That's what Power needed—a moment's hesitation. He snatched the toilet brush and began to talk.

"We've been good friends, Pete." He felt for the toilet tissue and planted a wadded fistful into the bristly hoop.

"Remember all those pinochle games you won from me." He had the can out now and was pouring the lighter fluid on the absorbent paper.

The handle on the door began to move again.

"Pete." This time the sound of his name did not stop him. The knob rattled.

"Don't do it, Pete. Don't do it! Go on back to your brother's."

The breathing beyond the door had become heavier and more rapid. When the words came they were mumbled—but their meaning was clear. "I gotta."

Power leaned forward in his chair. Every muscle was tight, every sinew seemed to lead to his cocked left thumb. The saturated brush was poised just above the lighter. He waited in knotted agony.

He heard Pete step back. His thumb snapped down on the lighter and a tiny flame sprang up. Then there was the sound of the quick two-step that brought Pete's shoulder crashing against the door. The bolt screws gave one resisting squeal, then yielded. As the door slammed against the wheel chair, the flame wavered in the draft. Quickly Power touched the flame to the saturated tissue.

The swift flash of ignition outlined the hulking figure, illumined the twisted face. Everything that had been coiled up in the old man unwound in one quick upward thrust. But the blazing brush touched only Pete's bulging neck. Pete grabbed at the burned spot but his glazed eyes remained fixed and the light of the flame danced along the up-raised blade.

A second, back-handed sweep of the flaring brand was better aimed. It dragged across Pete's eyes. Pete screamed. Fingers of flame started at his temple and raced across his head. The smell of burning hair filled the room.

Turning, stumbling, slapping at his burning hair, Pete fled toward the stairwell. Crashing and thrashing, he pitched head-long into the darkness. Power could hear the sharp crack of breaking bone just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before the huge body thudded to rest on the landing below.

The old man sat quivering in the bathroom. A piece of the disintegrating torch fell into his lap. Patting it out with his hand, he thrust the remainder of the flaming brush into the bowl. Then he rolled slowly out across the hall.

At the head of the stairs he stopped and listened. He could hear Pete's childlike whimpering. Suddenly he felt sick. He rolled back into his room and picked up the phone—only to remember that it was still useless.

Feeling very old and very tired, he stuck a cigarette into his mouth. He searched all his pockets and then realized he must have dropped the lighter back in the bathroom.

Maybe I really ought to quit smoking . . .

He sat and chewed on the unlit cigarette for a few minutes wondering how he could summon help. Gradually, he became aware of the silence. There was no more whimpering from below.

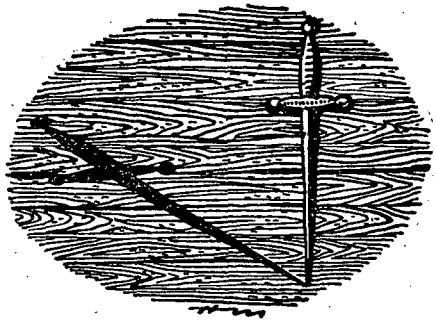
Rolling out into the hall, he strained and listened. No sound. He did not turn on the lights. He did not want to see. He just sat in the darkness.

Minutes later he heard the wail of a siren coming down Wilmot.

They must have missed Pete out at the farm.

He listened disinterestedly to the on-coming sound. Then, taking the cigarette out of his mouth, he crushed it between his fingers.

Downstairs the officers were pounding on the massive front door. Upstairs a lonely old man sat in the darkness and wept.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

***a new story by* DOROTHY B. HUGHES**

This is the first story by Dorothy B. Hughes ever to appear in EQMM. We welcome her most warmly, and hope it will become a habit . . . Dorothy B. Hughes is the author of THE SO BLUE MARBLE, IN A LONELY PLACE, RIDE THE PINK HORSE, *and most recently,* THE EXPENDABLE MAN*; and on James Sandoe's retirement from newspaper reviewing, Dorothy B. Hughes became the mystery critic for the "New York Herald Tribune."*

In the summer of 1963 Dorothy B. Hughes visited England, and some of the things she saw and heard so impressed her that she wrote "Danger at Deerfawn." But a curious phenomenon occurred. The Hughes style is normally and naturally as American as corn flakes and apple pie; but exposure to British scenes and British speech and British atmosphere and tradition acted partly like a transfusion. "Danger at Deerfawn" is remarkably Anglo-American, with a rather sedate background and mood, punctuated by brash and excitable Americans (especially Dorian). An interesting blend, don't you think?

DANGER AT DEERFAWN

by DOROTHY B. HUGHES

DORIAN SAID, "TOMORROW WE GO to Deerfawn Manor."

"Not me," said Jix. Inelegantly when you figure we were in Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's home town. But then Shakespeare was a great one for the vernacular himself.

"Not me," I echoed also ungrammatically, thankful that Jix at last had taken a stand against his sister's youthful vigor. When I, an assistant-assistant professor of drama from the unsuccessful side of the family, had greedily clutched at the gift horse of a summer in England keeping an eye on my young Hunter cousins, I hadn't considered that Twenty-seven doesn't have the bottomless pit of vitality of Nineteen and Twenty-two.

"And may I ask why not?" Dorian set her elbows on the table, almost but not quite bowling over our mugs of ale. The oaken tables at The Mace and Swan, an old Tudor black-and-white, timber-and-brick pub on Sheep Street, slanted in a Cotswolds downhill.

If Dorian had her way we wouldn't miss one Roman clump of stones, one Saxon antic column, one eroded

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Norman tympanum, nor one field or hall where the Edwards and Henrys and Charleses might have stopped to rest their horses and yeomen in that order. She'd been mesmerized last term by a fair-haired Briton who was giving a course in English history at Miss Waverly's Finishing School for Young Ladies—now called, in reverse snobbery, Waverly Junior College.

"I'm tired," I said. "My feet hurt. Tomorrow I plan to do nothing more strenuous than recline by the banks of the Avon and commune with the swans."

"And you?" Dorian's gray eyes stoned her brother.

"I'm up to here with Manor houses," murmured Jix, his eyes on the touring South Carolina girl several tables away—the one who looked like a strawberry ice-cream cone, not the one who looked like a flute.

"Then I'll go alone." It was all of eight miles to Deerfawn. But Dorian was of an age where for status a girl must have males in tow, if only a big brother and an aging cousin. "And you can forget about the Triumph."

Jix had hire-purchased a snazzy red Triumph convertible in London. The deal was one of those with the privilege of applying the payments on full purchase later. Jix wanted it for keeps. Dorian had a way with their father. But Jix had to toe the line for her support; this tour was Dorian's party, her graduation gift.

Without removing his eyes from South Carolina, Jix agreed, "Okay, okay, I'll go." If he hadn't been wearing that particularly noxious brown-and-mustard hound's-tooth jacket he'd bought in Cambridge, he'd probably have been invited South before now.

Dorian's eyes traveled thoughtfully to Brummel Coombe, two tables away. In The Mace and Swan, two tables removed was close enough for me, in an absent-minded gesture, to have hoisted the young English squire's mug as easily as my own. Ignoring the intervening table, Dorian addressed Brummel, more or less publicly, "Why don't you join us tomorrow?"

He couldn't come out with a final, "No, thank you"—he was too well-bred for that. Brummel was Upper-U, from the crown of his smooth flaxen head to his well-rubbed, handmade London shoes.

What he said was, in that inimitable, gentle British way, "Thank you very much, but I'm afraid you'd be a bit crowded." We had given him a lift from the Theatre last night; we were all stopping at The Oak and Swan, an old Tudor black-and-white, timber-and-brick Inn, likewise on Sheep Street.

"There'll be plenty of room." Dorian tried to keep her voice as quiet and unimpassioned as his but I could detect the victory in it. "Kell isn't going."

"That's right," I said to his questioning expression. "I'm going to take it easy tomorrow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brummel smiled on Dorian. You'd think from that smile he'd be as enchanted to go touring with her as vice versa. "If there's room—" He broke off with something like alarm. "Where's Clara?"

The flute answered him. "She said she was going down to the Sweetpotato." Because of the size of The Mace and Swan, anybody's business was everybody's.

Before her words were half piped, Brummel pushed away from his chair, and mumbling something like, "Excuse me one moment," was away.

That Brummel should be smitten with Clara was beyond comprehension. Yet never willingly did he let her out of his sight. Touring German girls we'd previously encountered were scrubbed and polished as by laundry soap and whetstone. Not Clara. Her streaky blonde hair hung unwashed and uncombed, now over one shoulder, now another, and her yellow pallor was heightened by smudges of green eye-shadow and a smear of pink lipstick. The only outfit she'd ever been seen wearing was a man's black sweater which hung to her knees, and slacks which might have once been rose-colored but were now a gritty red. Even Jix, who had not reached the age of discrimination if a female was under thirty, couldn't stomach careless Clara. While Brummel, the tweed-and-flannels, best-public-school lamb, followed her as if she were Mary of the children's nursery rhyme.

"Well," Dorian breathed, as the door closed behind him.

I said callously, "Give up, Dorian, it's no good."

"And let her take over?" Sometimes in Dorian, there was resemblance to Medea. "Come on."

"Not me," Jix echoed himself. Strawberry Ice Cream was gazing at him drippingly, I thought, Tom Swiftly.

Dorian didn't wait for more palaver. I caught up with her halfway down the block. "Do you think you're being quite smart?" I asked. "You'll never get anywhere chasing after him. Men don't like it." This hadn't been true since Victorian times but we men kept saying it.

"I am not chasing after him," Dorian retorted loftily. "I merely want to tell him what time we're leaving in the morning. I don't intend to sit up swilling ale all night like you and Jix."

By then we'd reached the Sweetpotato caff, a British version of an American juke-box joint, complete with blaring Elvis Presley records. Definitely non-Tudor, it was enormously popular with Stratford's younger set and with haversack tourists. The size of the Sweetpotato made The Mace and Swan seem spacious, and the saturation point had been reached before our arrival.

Clara's tour was there in numbers, including the bearded wonder she hung on when she could escape Brummel's attention. This was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dour character whose eyeglasses were usually focused on the pen scratches he made in a small black notebook. Neither Clara nor Brummel was present.

We started back to the pub. Halfway along the block, Dorian let out a muted pang. "Look!"

Across the street, just emerging from the close of The Oak and Swan, were the clusive two. Dorian dug her talons into my arm, indicating we were to give the appearance of having sauntered out for a breath of chill, damp night air, but we were counter-observed.

"I say there, Dorian." Brummel didn't yell—English gentlemen don't yell. However, in the hush, his words were quite clear. He came slanting over, leaving Clara in the shadows of the gateway. As he fell in with us, he said, "I'm sorry I had to run out like that. I'd be delighted to go with you tomorrow." Any knucklehead not bemused by Anglophilia would know that he'd checked with Clara.

Because I was annoyed with the way he brushed off either girl at will, I spoke up. "Is Clara going to Deerfawn tomorrow too?"

"No, she's going to Leamington —" He caught his breath. "Did you say Deerfawn?" His face was a study in anxiety, apprehension, and any and all other synonyms for almost fright.

Dorian didn't notice. She was ahead, opening the door—she hadn't learned to wait for men to do the amenities. "Yes, we're doing Deerfawn Manor House in the morning. Is ten o'clock all right? We want to go on to the ruins of St. Orlgwulf's Abbey in the afternoon." Prattling, she led Brummel inside.

I don't know why I looked back toward the close. But I did. The deserted Clara was still there, an incongruously sad little ghost, clutching the shadows. Her dirt was erased by the darkness; only her pale face and hair were visible.

She wasn't my problem; Dorian was. I followed the others into the pub, shutting Clara away in the night. Jix had moved to the southern exposure in our absence. Brummel now had Jix's place and Dorian seemed to have given up the idea of retiring for the night. This made me the happy old fifth wheel. I could now go back to the Inn and get a decent night's sleep.

I was as bright at breakfast next morning as Jix was bleary. Dorian was her normal effervescent self; she didn't need sleep. We'd finished our canned fruit juice and corn flakes, our fried eggs and scarcely cooked bacon with warm tomato, our cold toast and pot of orange marmalade—the traditional English breakfast—and we were dallying over our milk-and-sugar tea when Brummel appeared in the dining room.

We exchanged good mornings and the inevitable weather data before he said shamefacedly, "I'm afraid I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can't go with you today after all. Something has come up."

Dorian, after one unbelievably stricken blink, should have been recruited for the Stratford players—her consoling smile was that convincing. "I'm terribly sorry, Brummel. But if you can't, you can't. Maybe some other day."

You could tell he thought it was terribly decent of her to take it so well, and after a few more apologies, he back away.

"Evidently Clara isn't going to the Spa today." I was sorry as soon as I'd said it. "Long as there's room, I think I'll go Deerfawning with you. I've recovered my youth."

"You can drive," Jix said morosely. He was stuck with the trip because he'd talked Strawberry Ice Cream into meeting him there. Even his cherished jacket failed to uplift him.

It was a blue-sky day, one of the few when we could let down the top of the convertible without bailing. Eight miles is longer in England than in the United States. Who wants to speed through lanes dappled darkly with tall woods, and greened with smooth meadows where the sheep graze in motionless pattern, wearing red badges on their haunches to distinguish them from the pale saffron stones? To augment our leisurely pace, whenever a crumbling rock pile appeared on the horizon we had to stop at the nearest lay-by while Dorian loped back to investigate its import.

It was, therefore, close to eleven when we reached the gatehouse of Deerfawn Manor. The gatekeeper was on hand to collect our two-and-sixes and to present us with pink admission tickets from a wheel such as we used to have in movie houses before automation. We drove on up the cobbled half mile to the courtyard in the rear of the great Georgian house.

Deerfawn was not a National Trust—it wasn't that ancient. But the handbills at the desk of The Oak and Swan had built up a pretty picture of its fine carved staircase, its priceless library, its art masterpieces, and of the marble Folly in its woods, the only remnant of the original manor not destroyed in the Civil War. The English had a Civil War too. There were also peacocks—there were always peacocks—and formal gardens. Although the information had surely been compiled by the Marquis of Deerfawn, who just as surely had opened his house to the public to help pay his taxes, it might turn out to be of more interest than some of the shabby great houses we'd seen. For one thing, there were two authenticated paintings by Rubens and six family portraits by Van Dyck.

There was the usual sign pointing to the west basement where would be found the usual tearoom and curio and postcard counter. This was our first stop—as Jix demanded, to insure his life, coffee with a lacing of aspirin. Dorian chafed and wrote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two postcards to her two best friends at home, until Jix could navigate again. She then insisted that we return outdoors and make a proper entrance.

Jix said, "I'll shuck my coat and follow you." From where we'd parked the car we could look down the avenue and see if the coach tour was approaching. I wrote off Jix and his delaying tactics for the rest of the morning.

All in all, Deerfawn Manor House wasn't bad. It wasn't great like Warwick Castle—ah, Warwick! where I'd learned what the Biblical word "covet" truly means—but it wasn't impossibly tawdry like some attractions which shall remain nameless. We went unguided, yet not unobserved. There were guardians of the treasures stationed in each room to make sure filching was out of style.

It was past one o'clock when we again descended the carved staircase to the entrance hall.

"Now we'll do the gardens," Dorian announced.

"Hadn't we better have a bite to eat first?" I'd become as English as the English; despite the breakfast spread, I was ready for another meal.

"Later," Dorian stated.

The English are absolutely mad for gardens. As most of the tours this time of year were overwhelmingly composed of English-speakers, the formal layout surrounding the Manor was already overpopulated with ritual flower-print dresses and flat tweed caps.

One look and Dorian decided, "We'll come back. After we visit the Folly."

She headed for the footpath into the deep woods, just past the handmade wooden sign: *To the Folly*. Almost immediately the path became a narrow aperture leading into far deeper woods, the kind where the sun never penetrates the undergrowth of fern. The trees actually were as tall as cathedrals. Where the bark wasn't twined with ivy, it was deeply coated with lichen.

After a more than sufficient spell of stumbling and edging onward, I ventured, "I think we took the wrong path."

"How could we?" Dorian asked, but not with her usual assurance. "The sign pointed this way. You saw it."

"It could have been turned the wrong way," I suggested half-heartedly.

At that moment a strangled cry rose from somewhere in the density. Dorian bashed up quick against my quaking shoulder. And then I remembered. "Those damn peacocks!"

She managed a shaky grin and was herself again. She crashed on and before long called back to my plodding rearguard, "There's daylight ahead. This must be it."

Hopelessly, I hoped so. I was so hungry I was ready to turn poacher at sight of game. One thing came clear in our meandering: the reason Cromwell hadn't destroyed the Folly. He couldn't find it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ahead there was indication of a clearing of some sort. Dorian had disappeared off the path into it. I heard her cry out and I picked up speed. The cry hadn't been of delight but of disaster.

The open space was hardly bigger than a table top. Standing in it, facing each other, were Dorian and Brummel. He wasn't the young aristocrat of The Oak and Swan. He wore the leather apron and the mud-splattered boots of the Manor's outdoor staff.

His face was the color of rain and absolutely vacant of any expression. It took me that long to see what was at his feet. An oversized black sweater, dirty rose-colored pants, and flowing yellow hair. In Brummel's right hand there was a big rock. Its smooth surface was discolored.

"Oh, no," Dorian was whimpering.

My entrance released Brummel from shock. "You, too?"

Dorian also came to life. But she didn't run away. She ran toward him. "Come on. We've got to get you out of here."

He half stumbled as she tugged at him, then stoutly released himself and stood away. "Wait," he said. "I must—"

We all heard the suspicious rustle of leaves. It could have been some Cromwellian spy creeping up on us.

"One moment," Brummel whispered. He actually knelt and with quick fingers explored the crumpled body. He took something from beneath the sweater, palming the object into his apron pocket before we could see what it was. "This way," he said under his breath, absently picking up the weapon before he moved.

He set off into what looked like impenetrable forest but which shortly emerged into a path leading up a hill. Don't ask my why, like a dumb sheep, I followed a red-handed killer. Perhaps at the time it seemed better than being lost in the woods with no chocolate bar. As for Dorian, she doubtless had absolved him from guilt the moment she recognized the victim. Like most women, Dorian has a bloodthirsty streak where rivals are concerned.

When the going was easier, I suggested, "Hadn't you better get rid of that rock?" It was making me nervous.

"What rock?" he said, puzzled, and then realized he was still holding it. "Oh, the rock," he said vaguely. "Yes. Yes, I should, I presume."

He gestured us off the path, then advanced a few yards, pondered, and selected a tree no different from any other of the hundred trees in the forest. Carefully he tucked the rock under the ferns there. It didn't seem my place to point out that his fingerprints might be all over it. Possibly it wouldn't turn up for some three hundred years, and the Dorians of that day would believe the blood-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stains were made in the first Danish invasion.

Brummel seemed quite relieved to be rid of it. "Come along now," he said. "We must hurry." He was leading us not back to our hillside path but through and around the woods in what seemed a circular pattern. If Dorian wasn't uneasy, I was ashamed to be. And shortly there lay the enormous Manor House below.

Brummel paused only for a few breaths, looking down on the back court where the cars and coaches were parked. In sight were only a couple of drivers having a gossip over their cigarettes. The red shine of our Triumph was like a beacon.

Brummel said to Dorian, "You and Kell won't have any difficulty getting away. Don't talk to anyone —just go."

"But you're the one who has to get away," Dorian cried out, remembering to keep it a muted cry.

He shook his head. "I can't."

Of course he couldn't: he'd have to hide the body first.

Dorian thought quickly. "We can't either. We can't go off and leave Jix without a ride."

"I'll take care of Jix! Please. Hurry."

I was the practical one. "How do we get to the car? Make like birds or toboggans?"

"I'll lead you down," Brummel said, "but once we're in the court, walk over, get in your car, and take off. Fast." He didn't wait for Dorian to give him further argument. He set off on a transverse, and somehow or other we all managed to get down to the ditch below and start clambering up its slope into the courtyard.

We almost had it made when what can only be described as a hue-and-cry began. There were uniformed attendants legging out of every door and it didn't take someone of normal I.Q. to realize that the body had been discovered.

Under his breath, Brummel muttered, "That's torn it. Come on."

We fled to the Triumph and he squeezed in without the usual preliminary of ladies first. Dorian said, "You drive, Kell," and slid in beside him. The engine caught and we were headed down the drive before anyone could stop us. Not that anyone tried.

"Take off that silly costume," Dorian ordered, "And put on Jix's coat."

Brummel ducked out of the leather apron and stuffed it under the seat while Dorian helped envelop him in Jix's coat of too many colors. As a disguise is wasn't what I'd have chosen.

I kept a nice pace to the gate, not too fast, and returned the gatehouse attendant's friendly salute. The word hadn't reached him yet.

In the lane I picked up speed. "To Stratford?"

"Yes," Brummel said.

By this time we were approaching the turn into the Stratford road—approaching it, I suddenly observed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much too rapidly. I removed my foot entirely from the gas pedal. I didn't want to compound our troubles by crashing into the police car which was blocking the intersection.

Brummel sighed and Dorian, for once, said nothing. I braked, and a young constable strolled over to my side of the car. The bobbies in their helmets and dark formal uniforms somehow look unreal in the country; they belong in London.

"Good afternoon," he said pleasantly. "You've come from Deerfawn Manor?"

There was no other place we could have come from unless we'd been haring across the meadows, and he knew it.

I said meekly, "Yes, sir."

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to go back."

"But why?" Dorian asked with outraged innocence.

"There's been a bit of trouble, Miss," he said. "No one is to leave until the Chief Constable arrives."

There was no point to arguing, particularly with Brummel sitting there trying to look unperturbed and, in that dreadful coat, succeeding in looking like some ghastly Teddy boy. Back we crawled to Deerfawn Manor to join the now thronged courtyard.

We didn't need a guide to identify the nationalities of the tourists. The Americans were the indignant ones, the Continentals the wary, and the British the ones who accepted matters as if nothing untoward had happened. The only exceptions were Jix and his South Carolinian babe—they didn't mind the delay a bit. I noted that all of Clara's tour were on hand, including her special boy friend. He was trying to find the reason for this procedure in his guide book.

Brummel took off Jix's coat, placed it on the seat, and got out of the car. A member of the Manor staff was trotting toward him. He tried to cut away but the man planted himself head on. "I'm terribly sorry, your Lordship. It seems a girl's body has been found in our woods." The words came out distinctly in spite of the strong country accent.

Your Lordship. Our Brummel was the Marquis of Deerfawn! With my mouth dropped witlessly, I looked toward Dorian. Her mouth was also cavernous, but mercifully silent.

Brummel simulated astonishment. "A girl's body?"

"Yes, your Lordship." The servitor volunteered, "It would seem to be one of the trippers, sir."

"Is Colonel Whitten in charge?"

"He has been notified. He hasn't yet arrived."

Brummel gave some inaudible directions and the man took off at a brisk pace, away from the stone steps where the constabulary were gathered. Still ignoring us, Brummel strode toward them.

"Well," I uttered.

"Well what?" Dorian bristled. "Don't just stand there. Come on."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She followed Brummel and I followed her.

By then he was listening with gravity to what the police had to tell him. Meantime, his eyes were searching frantically, or as near to frantically as a Marquis' eyes could, the sinuous mass in the court. His frenzy changed to resignation as the police parted the crowd to permit the entrance of a large black Humber. From it dismounted what had to be Colonel Whitten, Chief Constable of the shire. His mustaches were as long as a soliloquy. But he was as deferent to Brummel as the old retainer had been.

An inspection post was being set up and the English, sure enough, formed the inevitable queue. The foreigners had no choice but to join it. When in Rome. As Dorian and I were up front, our turn came quickly. However, before I could give name, address, and passport number to the officer at the table, Brummel was saying, "These are friends of mine, Colonel Whitten. I can assure you they know nothing about this affair."

"All we know," said Dorian in a sweet, clear voice, "is that Brummel —his Lordship—couldn't possibly have killed Clara."

If she'd said she was carrying a nuclear warhead in her handbag, she couldn't have caused more consternation. I wasn't the only one whose mouth could drop witlessly—every policeman in the vicinity was doing it. Brummel looked as if he wanted to weep.

"Because," Dorian appeared not to notice any reaction, "she was already dead when he got there."

"You saw the body? You know who this girl was?" It wasn't the speechless Colonel Whitten but an intelligent looking bobby who put the question.

"Of course we knew her. She was the German girl who's been in Stratford all week."

"I can explain," Brummel said without conviction, eyeing the crowd as if trying to find an escape route through it.

"My cousin and I heard her death cry," Dorian orated melodramatically, dragging me into it, "before his Lordship found her."

The Germans who understood some English were falling to pieces. Loudly and tearfully.

"The reason he had that bloody rock—excuse me, but it was bloody —in his hands," Dorian carried on with simple devastation, "was that he knew it must be the murder weapon and he wanted to preserve the evidence for—"

At that moment I heard Jix's voice above all other sounds. A good loud indignant American voice. "What's that guy doing in my coat?"

The queue swayed in the direction of Jix's bellow. We all saw a figure in German shorts and Jix's hound's-tooth jacket racing toward the woods.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He mustn't get away," Brummel warned as he started after him. The police followed like Keystone Cops. Need I say that I, following Dorian, brought up the usual rear?

But Jix was well ahead in the chase. It was he who brought down the man before the others caught up, and wrestled the jacket off of him.

The thief, shouting and gesticulating in outraged German, was none other than Clara's dour friend, the black-notebook writer. Brummel waited until the German gulped for breath, then said in his most quiet way, "It's no good, Lengel. And it wasn't hidden in that coat."

On the outskirts of our panting group a rather tall man in a gray suit asked calmly, "What's going on here?"

Brummel's expression melted into enormous relief. "What took you so long, Freddie?" He indicated the captive. "This is your man. He gave himself away."

The police recognized Freddie as important. They parted to let him into the inner circle.

Distaste touched Freddie's mouth as he regarded the prisoner. "He didn't get away with anything?"

"With your men on guard? Not half," Brummel assured him. "Besides, he's only an advance man, Freddie. Clara was always sure of that. She nipped the notebook, gave me the nod—" His look saddened. "Evidently he missed it before I could get to her. He got to her first."

Freddie took a step toward the struggling Lengel.

"He doesn't have it," Brummel said. "It seems these Americans—" So much for the earlier friendship he'd protested for us. "—blundered on the meeting place before he had a chance to search the body."

"You have it?" Freddie relaxed.

"I found it." Brummel couldn't resist a gibe at the German. "He thought I'd hidden it in that coat I was wearing."

"You were wearing—" Freddie's calm faltered at sight of the coat on Jix's arm.

"As a disguise," Brummel said quickly. "I wanted to get the notebook to you before it became police property. Colonel Whitten—"

Colonel Whitten hadn't made the run. He could be seen in the distance at stone-step headquarters, puffing nonchalantly on his pipe.

"He does rather talk to reporters," Brummel regretted. "I was hoping we could continue to keep our plans private."

Freddie nodded agreement. "Let me have it."

"It's wedged under the seat of their car." Brummel gave our group the faintest nod. "The little red one."

Freddie took off at a sprint. Brummel loped behind. All strangers, and that included us, were thereupon herded down the hill by the police and pointed to the Manor gates. Dorian was determined not to leave but she had stupidly destroyed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whatever influence she might have had with the Marquis of Deerfawn. Without so much as a backward glance, the Marquis and Freddie were now moving away from our car, the notebook retrieved.

We drove single file back to Stratford. Even Dorian had no stomach for St. Orlgwulf's Eighth Century disasters after first-hand exposure to Twentieth Century violence. She spent the remainder of the afternoon on the banks of the Avon with me, inventing one far-fetched spy thriller after another to explain what had happened. Jix was again off somewhere with his fancy jacket and southern accent.

Dorian continued to fantasticate at The Mace and Swan that night until unexpectedly Brummel appeared at our table.

"May I sit down with you?" he asked. If he hadn't, Dorian would have yanked him into the empty chair. "I do want to apologize for any inconvenience I may have caused you today."

"They were spies, weren't they?" Dorian burst out.

"Oh, no," Brummel said, for a moment giving her that faintly alarmed glance which Britons reserve for nutty Americans. "They were after the paintings."

This was the summer of increasing thievery of art masterpieces. Dorian was disappointed. The stories she'd dreamed up in her own little head were much wilder and much more exciting.

"Freddie is head of the London branch of Interpol. They had a tip that Deerfawn was the next target. He asked me to help out. Working with Clara."

"Clara was an operative?" I goggled.

"She was good, wasn't she?" His somber face lighted. "The way she got herself up like a grisette."

"You mean—she wasn't really—" Dorian stammered.

"She was a lovely girl," Brummel said. Defendingly, not romantically. "A very clever girl. She got on the student tour that the gang was using as a cover and attached herself to Lengel." He shook his head. "We don't know if someone informed or if he suddenly realized that she wasn't as stupid as he thought her. But when she found out he was going to Deerfawn after telling her he was going to Leamington Spa, she knew she had to get the notebook as soon as she could. It has the plans for all the robbings in the Midlands. It's my fault she was killed." His emotion was too deep for display. "I didn't arrange carefully enough."

Dorian, possibly therapeutically, broke the silence. "I knew you didn't kill her."

Brummel came out of his shadows. "I'm afraid I panicked a bit when I saw you and Kell there. I'm rather new at this sort of thing. And I had to find that notebook." He turned and looked into Dorian's eyes, not half shy. "And I must say I wanted to get you away from there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before you found out my connection with Deerfawn. I was afraid it might spoil things between us."

It didn't. During our last days in the Stratford country, Dorian and Brummel were as inseparable as Jix and South Carolina. This was a happy breather for me. I read Shakespeare by day and watched it by night. I'm as much of a nut on Shakespeare as Dorian is on ancient monuments. Oh, yes, the Folly sign had a habit of veering. Most people had sense enough to take the pebbled path to the right, not wander into untrammeled woods.

I also had plenty of time for thought those days. But I wasn't able to discuss certain peculiar aspects of the Deerfawn day until we were off on the road again, headed toward Shropshire. Without Jix—he would join us after Miss South Carolina moved on.

I asked Dorian flatly, "What were you trying to do to Brummel, hang him? Telling the police all that stuff."

"Of course not!" she replied with indignation. "I knew he wasn't a killer, not even when I first saw him bending over the body with that bloody rock. Before you got there. He isn't the type."

A lecture on criminal types would have made no dent at that moment. She was on her high white horse with banners flying. "But if he was guilty," she proclaimed, "I wasn't going to let him get away with doing Clara in, just because of all that bow-and-scrape-your-Lordship stuff."

For one split second I believed Dorian had recovered from Anglophilia.

And then she was blasting in my ear, "Stop the car! Stop the car!"

I wondered if in the side mirror she'd noted Brummel catching up with us a day early. No, it wasn't that. It was only another ragged clump of rocks rising out of the rolling green.

With a silent sigh I wheeled into the nearest lay-by and stopped the car.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout (about **Nero Wolfe**)
Agatha Christie
Cornell Woolrich
William Irish
Hugh Pentecost
Patrick Quentin
Q. Patrick
Ed McBain
the **Gordons**
Julian Symons
Victor Canning
Kelley Roos
Philip Wylie
Helen McCloy
Neil Paterson
Ellery Queen
Michael Gilbert
A. H. Z. Carr
George Harmon Coxe

EQMM, 24th year

"Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" is now bigger and better than ever—32 extra pages in every issue, at 50 cents per copy. These 32 added pages every month bring you the highest possible quality of mystery fiction—from stories of pure detection (amateur, armchair, and official) and probing studies of crime (psychological, psychiatric, and Robin Hoodish) to tours de force of suspense, surprise, and even the supernatural.

One of the new features of the bigger-and-better EQMM is the inclusion, in most issues, of a *complete short novel*—superlative works by the Grand Masters of Mystery, including such celebrated detective writers as those listed alongside.

Be sure not to miss a single issue—you will never forgive yourself! Each year's issues of EQMM now offer nearly one-quarter of a million words in short novels, and nearly three-quarters of a million words in short stories—or *almost one million words every year* of the best reading this side of paradise!—a veritable library of larceny—the crème du crime—the diamonds of detection . . . each worth a King's (or a Queen's) ransom . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Excellent news for summer readers is that John D. MacDonald has created a new series of suspense novels, starring the attractive and complex detective (and freelance criminal) Travis McGee. The first two titles are THE DEEP BLUE GOOD-BY and THE PINK NIGHTMARE (Gold Medal k1405 & k1406, 40¢ each). And in paperback series, do not miss any of Donald Hamilton's authentically tough spy novels about executioner Matt Helm —all now available in uniform format (Gold Medal, 40¢ each). The latest, THE SHADOWERS (k1386), is one of the best yet.

★★★★★ **THE FIEND, *by Margaret Millar*** (Random, $3.95)
For the third time in this extraordinary year I'm driven to use 5 stars, this time for a faultless model of the modern crime story: at once a brilliant puzzle and an emotionally overwhelming novel.

★★★★ **THE INCONGRUOUS SPY, *by John le Carré*** (Walker, $5.95)
The author's first two novels (CALL FOR THE DEAD & A MURDER OF QUALITY) wisely revived for admirers of THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD.

★★★ **OUT OF THE DARK, *by Ursula Curtiss*** (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)
Delightfully unconventional novel of five children and murder, as coldly suspenseful as it is warmly comic.

★★★ **FRAME-UP, *by Andrew Garve*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)
In which the ever versatile Mr. Garve proves that he can also handle, with consummate skill, the pure formal puzzle-novel.

★★★ **THE HOSPITALITY OF THE HOUSE, *by Doris Miles Disney*** (Crime Club, $3.50)
Another of our most versatile makers, this time with an object lesson in the perils of meeting pen-pals in the flesh.

Baker Street notes: THE MAN WHO WAS SHERLOCK HOLMES, by Michael and Mollie Hardwick (Doubleday, $3.50), is an adroit double-biography of Holmes and Doyle, felicitously written and illustrated. . . . Eve Titus' BASIL AND THE LOST COLONY (Whittlesey, $2.95) is a charming adventure story for the 8–12 group, richly studded with private jokes for their Sherlockianly informed elders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

April Aarons' "first story" was "The Seal of God" in the September 1963 issue of EQMM. Here is her "second story"—and what a change in pace and tone! "The Seal of God" was serious and symbolic, written obliquely. Mrs. Aarons' "second story" is not at all serious or symbolic, and is decidedly not cryptic in style: it is, as the author herself described it, a "coffee house cliffhanger."

COFFEE HOUSE CAPER

by APRIL AARONS

MY NAME IS GRETCHEN CARLOTTA Brown—everyone calls me Pudgy-Face; and my guy is Hamilton Cooke—"Ham" for short. Right after the opening-night performance at Dimianto's tonight, Ham and I are going to Las Vegas and get married. There were times when I didn't think we were going to make it—because of a one-act play, my stubborn pride, and a little snake in the grass called Slim-Line.

Do I run ahead of myself? Sorry. I usually do.

Okay, I'm called Pudgy-Face and I'm a file clerk who writes plays. Ham is an electronics engineer and helps run his dad's firm. Dimianto's, where we hang out, is a fantastic coffee house *cum* "little theater" high in the Pacific Palisades north of Los Angeles. And Slim-Line, whose real name is Maria, is—was—my roommate.

And to start more or less at the beginning . . .

Ham would say to me, "Honey, let's hop in the Porsche and head for Vegas. We can be Mr. and Mrs. before morning."

And I would say, "Ham, I love you like everything, but before I marry you, I *will* see a play of my very own produced."

The next sound, of course, is that of Ham groaning. Not that I hadn't a chance for success. Dimianto's—the "in" place this year—is a showcase for new talent. Its proprietor, Mike Dimianto, had promised me that when I showed him something good, he would produce it. No, the thing that was holding me back was me—Gretchen Carlotta Brown. Because nothing, absolutely nothing, that I wrote ever satisfied me.

Incidentally, don't let the way I talk throw you. In our crowd it is *de rigueur* to sound very young. At Dimianto's everyone plays it like cool. Even the fact that Ham and I were "that way" was treated casually. But the bearded guys in the blue jeans respected Ham's proprietary rights, and the lanky females with the Cleopatra eyes stayed away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from my guy. Yet I knew, and Ham knew, that the unspoken question at Dimianto's was, "So when are those kids going to tie the knot?"

And that's what this is all about—how we almost didn't, I mean.

At the time I am speaking of, Slim-Line and I were sharing an apartment. Slim-Line was beautiful. Lustrous black hair and enormous gray eyes She modeled bathing suits on TV, and you know how *those* gals have to look!

But Slim-Line had aspirations. I guess that's a hazard with girls who really are too beautiful—aspirations, I mean. Slim-Line wanted to write plays, too. I was sympathetic, big oaf that I was, and I tried to help her out. She was, after all, my friend. I thought. Sometimes, on those nights when I thought Ham just might walk away and never come back, Slim-Line cheered me up.

She always said, "Darling, the boy is enthused! He's not just in love—he's enthused!"

Only—a hollow note was entering Ham's enthusiasm. To keep his sanity he even took to wearing a rabbit's foot on a chain around his neck on the evenings when he bundled Slim-Line and me into the big Porsche and took us to Dimianto's.

Sometimes, as Ham and I sat in the murky light of the candles on the tables at the coffee house, and Slim-Line indulged in her favorite sport of table-hopping, Mike Dimianto would wander by.

In his slow cigarette-deepened voice he would ask Ham, "Say, boy, what's the foot fur?"

And Ham would answer, "I'd rabbit not say."

At times like that, you just ignore men.

So, while Mike and Ham swapped terrible puns, and I stewed in the juice of my own ineptitude, and Slim-Line vamped all the guys in sight, the pressure kept building up between Ham and me. I had to write a good play and have it produced—or he would leave me flat.

Things came to a head on the night that Mike Dimianto made his big, and unexpected, pitch. He climbed up on the stage at Dimianto's, squinted under the glare of the spotlight, and said, "Like, I've got an important announcement to make. A gentleman who shall be nameless is holding a contest for playwrights—for one-act dramas. He is very anxious to encourage local talent. There will be three awards of one hundred dollars each. The three winning plays will be produced on this stage and there will be attendant publicity."

Mike turned and patted the wooden paneling behind him. He's kind of a nut at times, but for what he did on the night everything happened, I love him unto death.

Anyway, there was a lot of general comment about his announcement, and then Ham turned to me and said, "Honey, this is it! A real incentive! How about it?"

Well, I had just torn up a one-act-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er about a guy and gal who fall in love in the Peace Corps; and another that takes place in a girls' boarding school; and I was feeling that what I knew about the human race would be applicable perhaps to a lady from Mars.

So I answered, "Subject me a subject. Do you want love? Do you want pathos? High comedy perhaps?"

I stood up and waved an artificial rose I had snatched from the bottle-vase on the table.

I cried, "Drama! Tragedy! Romance! I can give them all to you!"

Ham looked at me thoughtfully.

"That's pretty good," he said.

"In a pig's eye," I said. I sat down abruptly. "Ham, I just don't think I have it."

"Now listen, Pudgy-Face, what's wrong with a play about this place right here? About a coffee house like Dimianto's?"

I looked around—at the bristling beards and the espresso cups and the nonobjective art.

"Dimianto's?" I said.

"Why not? There's a million stories here. Pick one. You and me, for instance. Or how Mike came to run this place. Make it kind of cute and gay, and you'll walk away with a prize."

Ham leaned over the table, the stupid rabbit's foot dangling from its stupid chain around his neck.

"Pudgy-Face," he said, "you gotta do it. It's now-or-never-time for us."

I looked around again. I took in the lights and the smoke and the noise and the people, and suddenly I drew a deep breath, from 'way down deep inside, where it hurts.

"You might just have something there," I said. "This might just do the trick."

Ham said softly, "That's my girl."

I took hold of his hand and squeezed it hard. I surveyed the crowded room once more. I saw Slim-Line several tables away, gesticulating madly at an admiring audience. It was easy to guess what had her so keyed up.

I said to Ham, "Slim-Line is all agog. She's going to enter the contest too. Gee, I hope she writes a good one."

Willingly, looking back, I accept whatever prize you care to offer for Idiot of the Year.

I shall now perform what we playwrights call a quick change of set, for your special benefit. If you're confused—and I do have that effect on people—you should know it is no small honor to have a play produced at Dimianto's.

It's true you see a lot of would-be's and has-been's wandering through its murky rooms, but you also see important theatrical people. There is something about a beat-up, hill-top coffee house that appeals to the *haute monde*, as well as to file clerks itching to write plays, like me.

But that's not the only reason peo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple hang out there. Dimianto's is a popular joint because people new to California have to get acquainted somehow, and in that crazy place all you have to do to start a conversation is to open up your mouth.

So, for someone like me, a production at Dimianto's amounted to a very respectable beginning. Toward that end, and to win a prize, I drove myself.

To give her credit, Slim-Line drove herself, too. Every night, while I pounded on my typewriter in the living room, Slim-Line worked at a table in the bedroom. Ham spent his evenings curled on our sofa, going through the paper work that he says being the boss's son entitles him to.

If I took a break, Ham would say, "Get on with it, Pudgy-Face. Men are winging their way around the globe, and I am without a wife. Come on, put in that bit about how Mike stole his first espresso machine from a gangster in Chicago."

"Ham, he did not!"

"It sounds good. Put it in anyway."

Once in a while Slim-Line would wander out from the next room and gaze on us.

One time she said, "Well, darlings, are you jelling?"

Ham answered, "Slim-Line, if we're jelling, are you jealous?"

She tossed her lovely mane of dark hair and retorted, "I haven't time to be jealous!"

She stormed away, and I said to Ham, "What a rotten thing to say! After all, I have to live with the girl!"

Ham looked at me thoughtfully, but all he said was, "Get back to work, Pudgy-Face . . . dear."

And so day followed day at a frantic pace. I created people, and tore them to pieces. I wrote a scene for laughs, and burst into tears. But late one evening, only three days before the deadline of the contest, I looked up from my overworked typewriter and said, "Ham, I've got it."

Ham leaped from his chair. He grabbed the sheets of paper from my desk.

Fifteen minutes later, in a voice that shook just a little, Ham said, "Baby, you sure have. It's great!"

Ham and I were like a couple of kids. I hate to say it, but we forgot all about Slim-Line—that is, until she appeared in the bedroom doorway, breathing holy fire.

She demanded, "Did you finish your play?"

"Glory be, I did!" I cried.

"Darling, I envy you. Yes, frankly, I do. I'm no good. I just can't do anything."

Slim-Line hung her gorgeous head and cried.

Weeping women get to Ham, and in anguish he whispered to me, "What'll we do?"

I whispered back, "Get out, and leave her to me."

Ham gathered up his papers and headed for the door. Then he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stopped. "Type up that play now, Pudgy-Face," he said. "Tomorrow night we're taking it to Mike."

"Okay!" I pushed Ham out the door. "Now shoo!"

I turned around with the idea of making mother-hen noises at Slim-Line, but—she was avidly reading my play. Without a smile, either. From curtain to curtain she never smiled.

When she finished, she snapped at me angrily, "What makes you so damn clever?"

"Hold on!" I said. "It's me, Pudgy-Face—remember?"

Slim-Line put on a contrite expression and sank onto the sofa. "Darling, I'm so sorry," she said. "So very, very sorry. Of course it's a lovely play, a wonderful play. Please forgive me."

"I'm sorry, too, Slim-Line. I mean . . . I'm just overwrought. I have to type the final script tonight. Carbon copies and all."

Slim-Line rose from the sofa. She said, "A good play. A great guy in your corner. Lucky. So, so lucky."

She headed for the bedroom and left me feeling miserable. I heard the sound of half-hearted typing, and I waited until she picked up speed. I thought then that she was feeling better and I went back to my own work. I carefully typed out my one-acter, with two carbon copies, and put all of it into a desk drawer.

The next morning I dragged off to work only after having made Slim-Line promise to stay in bed. During the night she had cried, and her eyes had got so red she couldn't have modeled for anything but a commercial for cold remedies.

That endless day passed somehow. When I got home that evening, Slim-Line wasn't there. A note on the sofa said, "Gone out for dinner."

I boiled an egg for supper and paced the floor. I had reached that state common to all playwrights: I couldn't bear the sight of my own material. While I waited for Ham, I had dark thoughts of leaping off high buildings or under speeding trains.

Hurry up, Ham, I silently begged him—rescue me, please!

He was to pick me up at eight. At five of eight he was at the door. His face was alight and he was close to dancing.

"Come on, kid," he said, "tonight the world is at your feet!"

My doldrums vanished. I walked happily to my desk and opened the drawer into which I had put all the copies of my play.

Ten seconds later Ham said sharply, "Pudgy-Face, what's wrong?"

I said, "Ham—the play—the play isn't here!"

I was staring into an empty desk drawer.

Somewhere, that same night, a giant second hand swept the face of Eternity's clock. Somewhere, people driven by that relentless forward movement fought and loved and played. But for Ham and me, that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

night, Eternity's second hand had stopped dead.

We tore the apartment apart. No play. We discovered that Slim-Line's clothes and luggage were gone from the bedroom. She had decamped—and obviously my play had gone with her. In my state of shock I was barely able to make it to a chair before my legs gave way.

Ham was already pacing the floor. "It's impossible," he said furiously. "What makes her think she can get away with it?"

"Because she has all the copies," I answered. My voice was faint. It seemed to belong to a stranger.

I said, "There's no way in the world I can prove that play is mine. No one ever saw it but you and me and Slim-Line."

Ham's lips tightened, and his silent rage was stronger than words. Then he grabbed me by the shoulders.

He said, "Just the same we'll make her grovel! Slim-Line can't recite that play from memory, can she? We'll tell Mike what happened. If Slim-Line can't give him the dialogue—all of it—it's obvious *she* didn't write the play."

"It's no good, Ham. Slim-Line had leading roles in all her high school plays. She told me once she could learn a full-length script in twenty-four hours. She's a quick study. And she's had twelve hours to memorize my one act."

Then, as quietly as I could, I added, "Ham, go away. Find some nice normal girl. Marry her and forget about me."

He ignored me. "Man, oh, man," he groaned. "Slim-Line must be on her way to Dimianto's right now."

Then with a quick movement he swept me from my chair, stood me on my feet, and shook me.

"Pudgy-Face, can you remember all the dialogue in your play? All of it?"

"Oh, Ham, why don't you just forget it!"

"Can you remember your own dialogue?"

"Yes, of course! They're my people, aren't they?"

"All right. We're going to Dimianto's and stop Slim-Line."

"How, Ham? How?"

He said, "Trust me."

He pushed me out the door and down the stairs toward the waiting Porsche. He dumped me in the front seat and let in the clutch. The car went rocketing into the night.

"Pudgy-Face," Ham said, "just remember every word and syllable of your play. And trust me. When we get to Dimianto's, just do what I say."

He proceeded to take corners on a wheel and a half, and he must have set some kind of speed record for that ride. The brakes screeched loudly when we hit the parking lot at Dimianto's. Before I could get the car door open, Ham was already vaulting from the driver's seat.

"Ready?" he said to me.

"Ready."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let's go."

Together we stormed through the front door. We fought our way through the crowd. Then, chummy-chummy in a corner over a sheaf of papers, we saw Mike and Slim-Line. *My* play!

Ham dragged me forward. When we stood in front of Mike and Slim-Line, I announced, so that everybody in the coffee house could hear it, "Slim-Line, that's my play you're holding in your hand!"

She turned on me, her gray eyes as cold as the sea before a storm, and yelled, "You're a liar!"

The silence that ensued in that crowded room was deafening.

"Well!" Mike Dimianto said finally. "Well."

Ham planted himself squarely in front of Mike. From his hip pocket he took a bundle of papers. He held them so that only Mike could see them.

"Pudgy-Face wrote that play, Mike, and we can prove it," he said. "This is a copy of the play. On it, Pudgy-Face made some last-minute changes in dialogue. But they were changes she had to think about. She wasn't sure enough to put them in the other copies. But they're in *this* copy."

"Well!" Mike said again.

He looked at the papers Ham was holding out to him, and a puzzled look came over his face.

"Ham!" I squeaked. "Where did you get—"

Under cover of a convenient chair Ham kicked me in the ankle.

He said to Mike. "I propose that the girls go through this play from beginning to end, giving all the dialogue. The girl who wrote this play will remember where the changes fit in. She alone can put them where they belong, and she alone wrote this play."

I felt as if the top of my head might come off. What changes? What copy of what play? What was Ham *doing?*

Ham swung around to face Slim-Line and me.

"Is what I propose fair to both of you?" he asked.

Slim-Line made a small purring noise. "Of course," she said.

I said, "Ham, where'd you get—"

I got another kick.

"Okay," I mumbled.

Mike Dimianto then spoke up. "Sounds fair to me." He then told the crowd, "Everyone quiet down. No interruptions."

I saw that Mike and Ham were holding their respective copies expectantly, and that the regulars at Dimianto's were standing their distance—and waiting. Without preamble then, loudly and clearly, I said, "Scene One: On stage are Chuck and Sue, seated at a table in the coffee house"—and I threw out the first line of dialogue.

Slim-Line came right back at me, her voice sure and steady.

The play I wrote moves quickly and lightly. There are six characters

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in it; the setting is Dimianto's; and the main action centers around a guy named Chuck and a gal named Sue who are having romantic troubles. In the end they work out their problems, but in the resolution there are some cute and fast-paced lines.

I remembered every one of them. Slim-Line would throw out a line, and I would answer without the slightest hesitation. Each of us tried to trip the other. For ten minutes, in the dead silence of the crowded room at Dimianto's, we each gave as good as we got. The pressure became unbearable.

Then Ham turned a page of the script he was holding.

In a loud whisper—loud enough for Slim-Line and me to hear—he told Mike, "The change is on this page."

My opponent blew a line. She recovered, and went on—correctly. We were at the point in my play where the two main characters were having a serious argument. As a matter of fact, Chuck and Sue were on the point of breaking up.

Slim-Line had just fed me Chuck's speech. When she finished, I shot back the answer given by Sue. Then it was Slim-Line's turn again. She gave me the line as spoken by Chuck.

For the first time I hesitated.

Sue's answer—I could see it in my mind—was short. Somehow—and Ham told me later that I frowned at this point—it did not seem quite right. Something was wrong with Sue's answer.

I shut my eyes. Around me, I could literally hear the suspense. I opened my eyes, looked at Slim-Line, and then spouted four lines of dialogue that were not in the script. They changed the meaning—but they belonged!

Slim-Line stared blankly at me. She stuttered out half a line. It didn't fit. She tried again, mumbling a half dozen words. She stopped. The silence was a heavy blanket, muffling everything in the crowded room.

Mike Dimianto said, "What comes next, Slim-Line?"

She tried another tack. Then another. But none of it fitted, and she knew it. And Mike knew it. Someone in the crowd let out a long, low whistle, and Slim-Line burst into tears.

I strode forward until she and I were nose to nose.

I said, "Is it my play?"

"Yes. Yes!"

Mike Dimianto was icy.

"Slim-Line, get out of here," he said.

The crowd opened without a word. Slim-Line ran out of the room. Then everything happened all at once.

Mike Dimianto said to me, "Pudgy-Face, honey, your play should win a prize. If it doesn't, I'll produce it anyway. I like it."

People I didn't even know were congratulating me; and a couple of guys were slapping Ham on the back.

He was beaming like an impresar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

io with a smash hit, and it was all I could do to keep from using my fists on people as I pushed my way through the crowd to where he stood.

When I reached him, I shouted, "Ham, where did you get a copy of my play?"

"Take it easy, Pudgy-Face!" He grabbed my hand and the room quieted down.

"Now," Ham said, "*now* will you marry me?"

"Yes, yes," I sputtered. "*Now* will you tell me?"

Behind me, Mike indulged in a chuckle.

"Show her, smart boy," he said.

Ham held out the papers he had been holding during the play reading. The huge grin was back on his face. The sheets he gave me were covered with hand-drawn squares, inside of which were incomprehensible wiggling lines.

"This," I gasped, "this isn't a copy of my play!"

"No, Pudgy-Face. It's a set of electronics diagrams I brought home from the office."

Mike Dimianto laughed out loud. "Latch on to him, girl," he told me. "He's got gray matter."

I squealed, "The whole thing was a fake! Ham, you tricked me!"

"Pudgy-Face," Ham said, "last night when I read your play, I thought I saw just one weak spot—the argument between Chuck and Sue. I ought to know—we've had plenty of them ourselves!"

He held up the sheaf of diagrams again, and said, "When Slim-Line took your play, I knew there was only one way to stop her. If you could actually hear your play read out loud, concentrating only on the dialogue and not on how tricky Slim-Line was, you could spot your own mistake. Slim-Line couldn't see a weak spot if it hit her in the head. You could, and you did."

"Glory be," I sighed. "Ham—well, Ham—well, you know, don't you?"

I guess he did, because he put his arms around me.

Mike Dimianto cleared his throat. He stood on a chair and waved his arms.

He said, "What say, everyone? Espresso on the house. Let's drink to the health of the newly engaged couple!"

And that's the way it was. And I must say I never saw a finer sight: the whole gang at Dimianto's—beards, blue jeans, black tights, and all—toasting Ham and me with tiny espresso cups held aloft.

I should add a postscript. My play did take a prize. As I said before, tonight is opening night at Dimianto's.

After all the excitement, and "The Perils of Pauline" finish, I should now be quite calm. I'm not. Frankly, I'm all nerves. No, not about the play. What I'm nervous about is after the performance—when Ham and I take off for Las Vegas!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Don't you think gossip is dreadful? Of course you do! Then you won't mind lending an ear . . .

SOCIAL CALL

by MARJORIE RIDDELL

OH! HOW QUICK YOU'VE BEEN with the coffee. You quite startled me . . . No, no, it's all right, it just made me jump a bit . . . No, I'm quite all right, really. But you *shouldn't* have bothered, you know. I mean, it's very kind of you to make coffee, but I don't want you to think I'm *imposing*. I only dropped in for a minute, and after all you weren't expecting me, and . . .

No, please, you mustn't say it was *kind* of me to come—I *like* to be friendly. What delicious coffee. What I say is, one *should* give a welcome to people who are new to the town, don't you agree? And after all, you've been here three days now.

You'll find all the people round here very nice and friendly, I'm sure. Well, not all of them, perhaps—I mean, there's Mrs. Porter, for instance, but it's really quite a nice, friendly neighborhood, if you know what I mean. I mean, it's not like London. It's not like a big city. I expect you're looking forward to a little bit of peace and quiet, aren't you? It *is* London you came from, isn't it?

Oh, one of those huge blocks of flats. Yes, Mrs. Norton said you lived in a block of flats.

You don't know Mrs. Norton? She has that house round the corner with the broken gate. I should think it's a bit impersonal living in a block of flats, isn't it? Miss Gorridge lived in one when she was in London. It must be very expensive I should think—don't you think so? I mean, wouldn't you say it's—I mean, didn't you find it rather—well, it must be rather an *expensive* way to—

Miss Gorridge.

Oh, don't you? She has the end house along the road here, next to the Rainbows. Just Mrs. Rainbow it is now, of course, since her husband died last month. She hates dogs. Isn't that funny? She's a widow.

Well, because her husband died.

Oh, I see—well, I don't know why, she just hates them. She's the sweetest thing, of course. Retired now. She was a librarian.

No, Miss *Gorridge* was.

Yes, *sweet*. She really is. We're all terribly fond of her. Of course, she's a drug addict.

Oh, yes.

Yes, she is.

Oh, yes, she is, really.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, because *everybody* knows.

Well, because Mrs. Cranley was *there*. She was *there*, and Miss Gorridge fainted, and Mrs. Cranley went into the bathroom to see if she could find any smelling salts, and she opened the cupboard door, and there they were.

No, no—*drugs*.

Oh, bottles and bottles.

Well, there were bottles and *bottles*. Mrs. Cranley says she couldn't have counted them.

Well, *all* sorts. Aspirin, mouth wash, and some terrible *black* ones, and some queer *long*—

What?

The sun?

Oh, no, the sun's not in my eyes, thank you.

Yes, it's a *lovely* day. It's lovely up here. You're very lucky to have the top flat. It's so nice to have the French windows open like this and let all the sun and air in. They've converted very well, these old houses, haven't they?

Oh, really? Still a lot that needs doing?

Oh, repairs. Yes, well, they go on and *on*, don't they? The Rainbows had their house converted, you know, into four flats. Then they made it all over to their son and he has the income. Mrs. Peterson told me. Mrs. Harrison told her. They had to borrow from the bank, of course. Mrs. Thompson told Mrs. Harrison. But then there was this big insurance policy—you *know* about Mr. Rainbow, don't you?

No?

Yes, but even if you don't know the Rainbows I should have thought you'd have known *about* Mr. Rainbow—I mean, it's not the same—

Well, about the way he died. I mean, it was very strange about the—

Oh, I quite agree. Good gracious, I think gossip is dreadful. You're absolutely right. It's terrible the way some people gossip. Do you know, Mrs. Harrison told me that Mrs. Peterson told her that Mrs. Cranley said that—

What?

Oh, yes, this *is* a nice flat. But I expect you miss the central heating in your block of flats, don't you? And I expect you miss your work, too. Still, there are several good schools round here, though if you've retired I don't suppose—

Why, Mrs. Crosby told us. She said you were a schoolteacher and—

Mrs. Crosby? She lives opposite the Petersons. The house with the dead lilac. History must be terribly interesting, I've always *loved*—

History.

Well, you taught history—

Oh, but Mrs. Crosby said—

Oh, well, I'm sure mathematics must be fascinating, too. Although how you coped with all those boys I don't—

The boys at your school.

A girls' school? But Mrs. Rogers said—

Well, I should think you must be very clever to teach girls, too. *I*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think so anyway. *I* couldn't do it, whatever you might say. Though I don't blame you one bit for retiring as soon as you possibly could, I really don't. Still, if one's pension is the only—

Oh, yes, the new electric fires *are* nice. The ones like this, especially, that blow out heated air as well. Mrs. Frisby's daughter and her husband have one of the new houses over the river, and they've got that under-flooring heating.

No, it's not central heating. It's electric wires in the flooring or something. Mind you, the mystery is how they can afford it. He's only a clerk, whatever he and Mrs. Frisby and her daughter say. Mrs. Crosby says they're up to their eyes in debt, and Mrs. Frisby's *started taking in lodgers.* I mean, really! In this neighborhood.

Oh, well, one, so far—but it's only the thin end of the wedge, isn't it? Actually, she pretends it's her sister. She says she's come to live with her because her son's married. But nobody had ever *heard* of a sister before. Well, I ask you. Never even *heard* of her.

And that reminds me, I would just like to say how very sorry we all are about your poor sister.

Your sister.

Why, your sister who died a few weeks ago after all those years of polio—

Oh, your cousin. Oh, I see. I didn't—

Oh, heart trouble. Oh, we all thought it was polio. But still, a cousin's very close if you've lived together for years. You must miss her dreadfully. It must have been a terrible shock. How very brave you must—

Yes, it is a lovely day. What a terrible thing it must have been for you. And after nursing her as *well* as working for—

Yes, it's a lovely blue sky. After nursing her for twenty-five years you must be quite—

Twenty? But Mrs. Cranley said—

Yes, well, even so you must miss her dreadfully, and—

Yes, it's a very pretty sky. But I'm sure she was terribly brave. And I'm sure you were. I suppose she had a heart attack. Oh, how you must miss her. Tell me, what did the doctor—

Oh, how kind of you—well, pink suits me, you know. I'm so glad you like it. I must say it's a dress I'm rather fond of myself. It goes with my skin, you see.

Yes, isn't it a lovely day? Yes, it *is* nice being so high up. Even with the French windows open you don't hear very much noise from the road. And what a dear little balcony.

That was the thing about Mr. Rainbow, you see. Heights. I mean the way he died. They were on holiday, down at the coast. And *she* said he insisted on standing right at the edge of the cliff. And then he slipped and fell. And there wasn't anybody else around to see it. And *I* know he was afraid of heights. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me. And there was this big insurance policy that—

Oh, well, I *know* you get a better view of the sea from the cliff edge, but—

Yes, I *know* it doesn't mean anything, I'm not *saying* anything. I just think it's funny, that's all. Mrs. Harrison thinks it's funny, too.

Well, I mean she thinks it's funny.

What?

Oh, your furniture—yes, you have *beautiful* furniture. I was just thinking about it, as a matter of fact. I *love* the sideboard. Georgian, isn't it? Or Victorian. It's beautiful. A piece like that must be very expensive . . . ? And such *finish*. Even *inside*, it's simply—oh! Oh, dear! Oh, my goodness, you've quite caught me out, haven't you? I'm afraid I was rather *naughty!* It was when you were in the kitchen making the coffee. I did take just the teeniest-weeniest little peek into one of the drawers!

Aren't I dreadful? But it was only one of those *little* drawers. And it was so beautiful, you see. *Beautiful.* And it's simply *lovely* coffee. I *am* enjoying it. It's simply delicious. How clever you are, how very—

Oh, no, it's all right, I'm in no hurry me. Actually I told myself I'd turn out the bedroom cupboards this morning, and this is a good excuse not to do them! My husband thinks I work too hard, but what you don't know doesn't hurt you, does it? Unless it's murder, of course, and that's what's on my mind about the Rainbows, you see. All these murders they say are—

Yes, it's a very pretty carpet. All these murders they say are never even suspected. Goodness knows what's going on all the time, even in a place like this. I mean, it's called an—

Yes, I can see it's Persian. You see, it's called an accident or something and how can they prove otherwise? I mean—

Oh, yes, I think it's *dreadful* to gossip about people.

Yes, that's what I say. How funny you should mention it. I was only saying the other day to Mrs. Cranley, how extraordinary it is that you never hear of anyone being prosecuted for slander. No, it's libel, isn't it? Anyway, what I mean is that newspapers are, and publishers and people like that, but not just people living in a town, if you know what I mean. You'd expect it to happen *sometimes*, wouldn't you? Perhaps it's because most people wouldn't want the publicity. They'd rather deal with it themselves.

Well, I mean they'd rather do something about it themselves.

Well, like cutting you dead, for instance. My goodness, we've had that here all right. You'd never believe! I remember when Mr. Markham came back from hospital, and everybody knew it was for alcoholism, Mrs. Markham behaved in a *most*—

What? Bill? Who's Bill? We didn't know you were *divorced* or—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Oh, a *bill*. Oh, well, I don't think I really know anything about any new bill. Of course, politics are *interesting*, I do think that—I mean, if you're interested, that is. Actually, I don't think I'm going to vote the same way next time. I mean, have you noticed what a funny way the Prime Minister has his hair cut? I was just saying—

Oh—really? Of course, I always wear nice bright colors. Fancy you liking my dress so much. It suits me, doesn't it? Mind you, and I wouldn't tell a living soul, but it is just a teeny-weeny bit tight.

Oh, yes, it is.

Oh, but it is.

Oh, isn't it?

Well, I do think they ought to fit well, I must say. I have to be rather careful, though, all the same.

Well, chocolates, for instance. I keep off them usually—though I know I shan't be able to today. Look, isn't this a lovely box of chocolates? Mrs. Rainbow gave them to me.

Just now, just as I was on my way to see you. She said they were for my birthday. So I told her my birthday isn't until next month, and she said not to mind, they were still for my birthday. It's funny, isn't it? We've never been very friendly. And certainly not since she murdered her husband. She's a funny woman. Did I tell you she hates dogs.

Of course, I know why she's doing it. It's obvious.

Well, it's a sort of bribe, you see. She's trying to make friends with me.

Well, because I know about her husband being afraid of heights. You see, often they catch a murderer only because the neighbors tell them what they know. Neighbors often know things. Mrs. Peterson says I should go to the police. I'm not surprised she hates dogs, when you think of the sort of woman she is. I expect they hate her, too.

Yes, *doesn't* the time fly? What a pretty clock. Mind you, she's fond of children. I'll say that for her, she's fond of children. She has lots of little nieces and nephews, just like you.

Well, I just know you have. *Nobody* told me—

Well, because of the toys. I suppose there are some birthdays coming along and—

Well, in that cupboard over there—oh! Oh, I've done it again! Oh, dear, what must you *think* of me! Well, I did just—

Well, yes, when you were getting the coffee, I did just open it the teeniest-weeniest little inch or two—and what a *beautiful* cupboard. Oh, I *do* think you were clever to line it like that with wallpaper, and I do—

Yes, the time *flies*, doesn't it? Such *beautiful* wallpaper—

Oh, have you? A lunch appointment? Well, then, I'd better be on my way. What a delightful little chat we've had. Oh, my chocolates. I mustn't forget those. There—I'll just pop them into my bag. Fancy Mrs. Rainbow bothering to find out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that peppermint creams are my favorite.

What a lovely view from your French windows. Why, you can see right across the river.

What a dear little balcony.

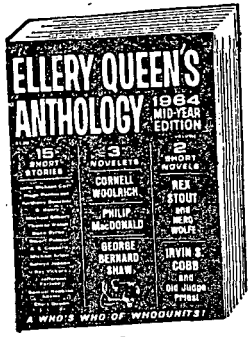
Oh, I can see *miles* from out here. Why, I can probably see Mrs. Frisby's daughter's house. She has a little boy, you know, and they're ruining him. *Spoiling* him. He has every single thing he asks for, it's disgraceful.

I gave him a clockwork mouse for Christmas, and he threw it in the river. Would you believe it? I know they're not the most expensive things you can buy, but after all I only know the child slightly. And the really lifelike ones are not *cheap*. Well, *you* know that, you've bought some for your nephews. Still, with *his* parents, what chance has the child got?

Oh, what a view! How your poor dear cousin would have loved it. Unless she was afraid of heights, of course, like poor Mr. Rainbow.

No?

Oh, isn't that funny? Of course, some people are like that. Isn't it strange? It's spiders that terrify me. Not mice at all. Isn't that interesting? What a funny creaking noise your balcony makes. I do hope it's sa—



For the best in mystery reading

ELLERY QUEEN'S 1964 MID-YEAR ANTHOLOGY
—$1 per copy

Buy your copy at your newsstand—or use coupon below

ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY / 505 PARK AVENUE / NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022

Please send me_____copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S 1964 MID-YEAR ANTHOLOGY—Edition No. 7. I am enclosing $1 for each copy ($1.25 outside U.S.A.).

Name_____
(Please print)

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip Code_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE DEATH OF DON JUAN

by ELLERY QUEEN

(*Continued from page 66*)

ACT III. Scene 1.

Ellery awoke at noon. He leaped for the door and took in the *Record*, with its familiar yellow label conveying the compliments of the Hotel Hollis. For the first time in years the *Record's* front page ran a two-line banner:

MURDER HITS WRIGHTSVILLE!
FAMOUS STAGE STAR SLAIN!

The account of the crime was wordy and inaccurate. There were publicity photos of Foster Benedict and the cast. The front page was salted with statements by Dr. Farnham, members of the audience, cast, stage crew, even police. Chief Anselm Newby's contribution was boxed but uninformative.

The *Record* quoted Stanley Bluefield ("The Playhouse must go on"), Archer Dullman ("No comment"), and Ellery Queen ("Any statement I might make about Benedict's death would encroach on the authority of your excellent Chief of Police").

There was a story on Mark Manson under a one-column cut showing him at a bar, uninjured arm holding aloft a cocktail glass ("Mr. Manson was found at the Hollis bar at a late hour last night on his discharge from Wrightsville General Hospital, in company of his manager, Archer Dullman. Asked to comment on the tragedy, Mr. Manson said, 'Words truly fail me, sir, which is why you discover me saying it with martinis.' With the help of this reporter, Mr. Dullman was finally able to persuade Mr. Manson to retire to his hotel room.")

A choppy review of the first act of *The Death of Don Juan* showed evidences of hasty editing. What the original copy had said Ellery could only imagine.

The sole reference in print to Joan was a cryptic "Miss Joan Truslow and Mr. Roger Fowler of The Playhouse staff could not be located for a statement as we went to press."

Of Foster Benedict's dying words no mention was made.

Ellery ordered breakfast and then hurried his shower.

He was finishing his second cup of coffee when the telephone rang. It was Roger.

"Where the devil did you hide Joan last night?"

"In my Aunt Carrie's house." Roger sounded harassed. "She's in Europe, left me a key. Joan was in no condition to face reporters or yak with the likes of Emmeline DuPré. Her father knows where we are, but that's all."

"Didn't you tell Newby?"

"Tell Newby? It's Newby who smuggled us over to Aunt Carrie's. Considerate guy, Newby. He has a cop staked out in the back yard and another in plain clothes parked across the street in an unmarked car."

Ellery said nothing.

Roger continued grimly, "I gave

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joanie a sleeping pill and stayed up most of the night biting my nails. Far as I know, Newby has no direct evidence against Joan—just those last words of a dying man whose mind, if you ask me, was already in outer space. Just the same, I'll feel better with a lawyer around. Before I call one in, though . . ." Roger hesitated. "What I mean is, I'm sorry I blew my stack last night. Would you come over here right away?"

"Where is it?" Ellery almost chuckled.

Roger gave him an address on State Street, in the oldest residential quarter of town.

It was an immaculately preserved 18th century mansion under the protection of the great elms that were the pride of State Street. The black shades were drawn, and from the street the clapboard house looked shut down.

Ellery strolled around to the rear and knocked on the back door, pretending not to notice the policeman lurking inside a latticed summerhouse. Roger admitted him and led the way through a huge kitchen and pantry and along a cool hall to a stately parlor whose furniture was under dust covers.

Joan was waiting in an armchair. She looked tired and withdrawn.

"This is all Roger's idea," she said, managing a smile. "From the way he's been carrying on—"

"Do you want my help, Joan?"

"Well, if Roger's right—"

"I'm afraid he is."

"But it's so stupid, Mr. Queen. Why would Foster Benedict accuse *me?* And even if he had some mysterious reason, how can anyone believe it? I didn't go near him . . . I've always hated knives," she cried. "I couldn't use a knife on a trout."

"It isn't a trout that was knifed. Joan, look at me."

She raised her head.

"Did you kill Benedict?"

"No! How many times do I have to say it?"

He lit a cigarette while he weighed her anger. She was an actress of talent—her performance the night before in the face of Benedict's coarse horseplay had proved that. It was a difficult decision.

"All right, Rodge," Ellery said suddenly. "Speak your piece."

"It's not mine. It's Joan's."

"I'm all ears, Joan."

Her chest rose and fell. "I lied to Chief Newby when I said I'd never known Foster Benedict before last night. I met Foster six years ago here in Wrightsville. I was still in high school. Roger was home from college for the summer."

"In *Wrightsville?*"

"I know, he acted as if he'd never heard of Wrightsville. But then I realized it wasn't an act at all. He'd simply forgotten, Mr. Queen. He was one of Stanley Bluefield's house guests for a few weeks that summer."

"He didn't even remember Stanley," Roger said bitterly. "Let's face it, the great lover was one step ahead of the butterfly net."

"Then it was a practical lunacy," Ellery remarked. "Every six months out of the past ten or twelve years Benedict practiced house-guesting as a sort of unemployment insurance. Dullman claims he averaged fifteen hosts a year. He must have had a hard time keeping track. Go on, Joan."

"I was sixteen, and Foster Benedict had been my secret crush for years,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joan said in a low voice. "When I read in the *Record* that he was staying at Mr. Bluefield's I did a very silly thing. I phoned him."

She flushed. "You can imagine the conversation—how much I admired his work, my stage ambitions . . . He must have been having a dull time, because he said he'd like to meet me. I was in seventh heaven. He began to take me out. Drives up to the lake. Moonlight readings . . . I certainly asked for it."

She sat forward nervously. "I guess it was like one of those old-time melodramas—the handsome roué, the foolish young girl—the only thing missing was the mortgage. Would you believe that when he promised me a part in his next play I actually fell for it?" Joan laughed. "And then he went away, and I wrote him some desperate love letters he didn't bother to answer, and I didn't see or hear from him again until last night.

"And then when he made his royal entrance into The Playhouse, he not only didn't remember Wrightsville, or Mr. Bluefield, he'd forgotten me, too."

She was staring into the mirror of the time-polished floor. "I was a stranger to him. Just another scalp to add to his collection. I'd meant so little to him that not even my features had registered, let alone my name."

"I warned you six years ago that Benedict was pure poison," Roger shouted, "but would you listen? Ellery, if you knew how many times I've begged her to get off this acting kick and marry me—"

"Let's get to you, Rodge. I take it your evasions last night also covered up a prior acquaintance with Benedict?"

"How could I explain without dragging Joan into it?"

"Then you met him at the same time, six years ago?"

"I knew she was dating him—a high school kid!—and I'd read of his weakness for the young ones. I was fit to be tied. I collared him one night after he took Joan home and I warned him to lay off. I said I'd kill him, or some such juvenile big talk. He laughed in my face and I knocked him cold. He was sore as hell about it—I'd mussed up his precious profile—and he banged right down to headquarters to prefer charges of assault. That was when Dakin was Chief of Police. But then I guess Benedict had second thoughts—bad publicity, or something. Anyway, he dropped the charges and left town."

"Did the brawl get into the *Record*?"

Roger shrugged. "It was a one-day wonder."

"And was Joan named in the story?"

"Well, yes. Some oaf at headquarters shot his mouth off. Dakin fired him."

Ellery shook his head. "You two are beyond belief. How did you expect to keep all that from Newby? Last night when you denied having known Benedict, Joan, didn't you notice Newby send one of his men on an errand? He's a city-trained policeman—he wouldn't take your word. He'd check the *Record* morgue and his own headquarters files. He may even have phoned the New York City police to search Benedict's apartment—Benedict's bragged often enough in print about his collection of feminine love letters.

"So Newby either knows already, or he'll learn very soon, that you both lied to him on a crucial question, and exactly what happened six years ago, and exactly why. Don't you see what you've

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handed him?—On a silver platter?"

Joan was mute.

"From Newby's viewpoint there's a strong circumstantial case against you, Joan. Situated in the only other dressing room on that side of the theater, you had the best opportunity to kill Benedict without being seen. The weapon? You wouldn't have had to move a step out of your way en route to Benedict's dressing room to take the knife from the tool chest. What's been holding Newby up is motive."

Joan's lips moved, but nothing came out.

"Newby knows perfectly well that Benedict's conduct onstage last night, rotten as it was, toward a girl who'd never laid eyes on him before would hardly pass muster as a reason for her to run for the nearest knife. But with the background of that romance between you six years ago in this very town, Joan, and your lie about it, and especially if the New York police dig up your letters, Benedict's humiliation of you in public last night takes on an entirely different meaning. It becomes a motive that would convince anybody. And any jury.

"Add to opportunity, weapon, and motive Benedict's dying declaration, and you see how near you are to being formally charged with the murder."

"You're a help," Roger flared. "I thought you'd be on Joan's side."

"And on yours, Roger?"

"Mine?"

"Don't you know you're Newby's ace in the hole? You threatened six years ago to kill Benedict—"

"Are you serious? That was just talk!"

"—and you beat him up. You've admitted the knife that killed Benedict is yours, and you brought it to the theater the day of the murder. You probably can't account for your whereabouts every minute of the short murder period. If not for Benedict's statement, Newby would have a stronger case against you than against Joan. As it is, Rodge, you may be facing an accessory charge."

For once Roger found nothing to say. Joan's hand stole into his.

"However," Ellery said briskly. "Joan, do you still say you didn't kill Benedict?"

"Of course. Because I didn't."

"Would you be willing to take a test that might prove you didn't?"

"You mean a lie detector test?"

"Something far more direct. On the other hand, I've got to point out that if you did kill Benedict, this test might constitute evidence against you as damning as a fingerprint."

Joan rose. "What do I do, Mr. Queen?"

"Rodge, ask the police officer in the car parked across the street to drive Joan and you to Newby's office. I'll meet you there." He took Joan's hand in both of his. "This is beginning to shape up as quite a girl."

"Never mind her shape," Roger said. "Can't you go with us?"

"I have something to pick up," Ellery said, "at a hardware store."

ACT III. Scene 2.

Ellery walked into Anselm Newby's office with a small package under his arm to find Joan and Roger seated close together under Newby's mineral eye.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A tall thin man in a business suit turned from the window as Ellery came in.

"Fowler's been telling me about some test or other you want to make, Queen," the little police chief said acidly. "I thought we'd agreed you were to keep your nose out of this case."

"That was a unilateral agreement, you'll recall," Ellery said, smiling. "However, I'm sure you wouldn't want to make a false arrest, and the Prosecutor of Wright County wouldn't want to try a hopeless case. Isn't that so, Mr. Odham?" he asked the man at the window.

"So you know who I am." The tall man came forward with a grin.

"The *Record* runs your photo with flattering regularity."

Prosecutor Odham pumped Ellery's hand. "Art Chalanski, my predecessor, had told me some fantastic stories about you."

"Apparently Chief Newby doesn't share your enthusiasm for fantasy," Ellery murmured, "By the way, Mr. Odham, you *were* about to charge Joan Truslow with the Benedict murder, weren't you? I haven't dared ask the Chief."

Newby glared and Prosecutor Odham chuckled. But there was no humor in the Prosecutor's frosty gray eyes.

"What have you got, Mr. Queen?"

Ellery said politely to the police chief, "May I see the knife?"

"What for?"

"In a moment. Don't worry, Chief. I won't so much as breathe on it."

Newby opened the safe behind his desk and brought out a shallow box padded with surgical cotton. The blood-stained knife lay on the cotton. He held on to the box pointedly.

"This thin short line of indentations in the tape of the handle." Ellery made no attempt to touch the knife. "Have you determined yet what made them, Chief?"

"Why?"

"Because they may either blow up your case against Joan or nail it down."

Newby flushed. "You'll have to show me."

"I intend to. But you haven't answered my question. Have you decided what kind of marks these are?"

"I suppose you know!"

"Anse," Odham said. "No, Mr. Queen, we haven't. I take it you have?"

"Yes."

"Well?" Newby said. "What are they marks of?"

"Teeth."

"Teeth?" The Prosecutor looked startled. So did Joan and Roger.

"Maybe they're teeth marks and maybe they're not," Newby said slowly, "though I admit we didn't think of teeth. But even if they are. Only two teeth could be involved —"

"Four," Ellery said. "Two upper and two lower—there are corresponding impressions on the other side of the haft. What's more, I'm positive they're front teeth."

"Suppose they are. These could only be edge impressions, and they're certainly not distinctive enough for a positive identification."

"You may be right," Ellery said soberly. "They may not prove to be positive evidence. But they may well prove to be negative evidence."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Suppose I can demonstrate that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joan Truslow's front teeth couldn't possibly have left these marks? Or any pairs of her contiguous teeth upper and lower, for that matter? Mind you, I don't know whether they demonstrate any such thing. The only teeth I've experimented with so far are my own. I've explained to Joan the risk she's running. Nevertheless, she's agreed to the test."

"Is that so, Miss Truslow?" the Prosecutor demanded.

Joan nodded. She had a death grip on the sides of her chair seat. As for Roger, he had entangled himself in an impossible combination of arms and legs.

Odham said, "Then Mr. Queen, you go right ahead."

Ellery's package remained intact. "Before I do, let's be sure we agree on the significance of the teeth marks. Last night Roger told us he didn't put the freshly taped knife in the tool chest backstage until Act One was nearly over. Rodge, were those marks in the tape when you dropped the knife in the chest?"

"You've forgotten," Roger said shortly. "I've never seen them."

"My error. Take a look."

Roger untangled himself and took a look. "I don't see how they could have been. The knife wasn't out of my possession until I put it in the chest, and I'm certainly not in the habit of gnawing on knife handles." He went back to Joan's side and entangled himself again.

"What would you expect Fowler to say?" Newby said.

Joan's hand checked Roger just in time.

"Well, if you won't accept Roger's testimony," Ellery said, "consider Arch Dullman's. Last night Dullman said he saw the knife in the chest directly after the curtain came down—as Benedict came offstage, in fact—and he was positive there were no indentations in the tape at that time. Didn't Dullman tell you that, Chief?"

Newby bit his lip.

"By the testimony, then, someone bit into the tape *after* Benedict entered his dressing room and *before* we found him. In other words, *during the murder period*." Ellery began to unwrap his package. "The one person who we know beyond dispute handled the knife during the murder period was the murderer. It's a reasonable conclusion that the impressions were made by the murderer's teeth."

Chief Newby's teeth were locked. But Odham said, "Go on, Mr. Queen."

Out of the wrappings Ellery took a roll of new black plastic friction tape and a large hunting knife. He stripped the cellophane from the roll and handed roll and knife to Roger. "You taped the original knife, Rodge. Do a repeat on this one." Roger set to work. "Meanwhile, Joan, I'd like you to take a close look at the original."

Joan got up and walked over to Newby. She seemed calmer than the Chief.

She really has talent, Ellery thought. "Notice the exact position of the marks relative to the edge of the handle."

"About an eighth of an inch from the edge."

"Yes. Oh, thanks." Ellery took the test knife from Roger and gave it to Joan. "I want you to take two bites. First with your front teeth about an eighth of an inch from the edge, as in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the other one." He looked at her. "Go ahead, Joan."

But Joan stood painfully still.

"The moment of truth, Joan?" Ellery said with a smile. "Then try the Method. You're a pirate and you're boarding the fat Spanish galleon with a knife in your teeth, like any self-respecting buccaneer." He said sharply, "Do it."

Joan breathed in, placed the haft to her mouth, and bit into it firmly.

Ellery took it from her at once and examined the marks. "Good! Now I want you to take a second bite—well clear of the first, Joan, so the two bites don't overlap. This time, though, make it a full bite."

When she returned the knife Ellery ran to the window. "May I have the other one, Chief?" He was already studying the test impressions through his lens. Newby, quite pale, brought the murder weapon, Odham at his heels.

Joan and Roger remained where they were, in a dreadful quiet.

"See for yourselves."

The police chief peered, squinted, compared. He went back to his desk for a transparent ruler. He made a great many deliberate measurements. When he was through examining the upper surfaces of the hafts he turned the knives over and did it all again.

Finally he looked up. "I guess, Mr. Odham," he said in a rather hollow voice, "you'd best check these yourself."

The Prosecutor seized knives and lens. Afterward there was a glint of anger in his eyes. "No impressions of any two adjoining teeth, either in the matching bite or the full set, are identical with the impressions on the murder knife. Same sort of marks, all right, but entirely different in detail—not as wide, not the same spacing—there can't be any doubt about it. You have a lot to thank Mr. Queen for, Miss Truslow. And so do we, Anse. I'll be talking to you later."

Not until Odham was gone did Joan's defenses crumble. She sank into Roger's arms, sobbing.

Ellery turned to the window, waiting for Newby's explosion. To his surprise nothing happened, and he turned back. There was the slender little chief, slumped on his tail, feet on desk, looking human.

"I sure had it coming, Queen," he said ruefully. "What gripes me most is having put all my eggs in one basket. Boom."

Ellery grinned. "I've laid my quota of omelets, Chief. Do you know anyone in this business who hasn't?"

Newby got to his feet. "Well, now what? Between Benedict's putting the finger on this girl and your removing it, I'm worse off than when I started. Can you make any sense out of this, Queen?"

"To a certain point."

"What point's that?"

Ellery tucked his lens away. "I know now who killed Benedict and why, if that's any help."

"Thanks, buddy."

"No, I mean it."

"I wish I could appreciate the rib," Newby sighed, "but somehow I'm not in the mood."

"But it's not a rib, Chief. The only thing is, I haven't a particle of proof." Ellery rubbed his nose as Newby gaped. "Though there *is* a notion stirring . . . and if it should work . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ACT III. Scene 3.

The following morning's *Record* shouted:

Local Girl Cleared in Killing!

The lead story was earmarked "Exclusive" and began:

"Joan Truslow of the Wrightsville Playhouse company was proved innocent yesterday of the Foster Benedict murder by Ellery Queen, the *Record* learned last night from an unusually reliable source.

"Miss Truslow, allegedly Chief Anselm Newby's main suspect in the Broadway star's sensational killing, was cleared by the New York detective in a dramatic session at police headquarters. A secret demonstration took place in the presence of Chief Newby and Prosecutor Loren Odham of Wright County. The exact nature of the test was not disclosed, but it is said to have involved the knife that slew Benedict.

"Chief Newby would neither affirm nor deny the *Record's* information.

"'I will say that Miss Truslow is no longer a suspect,' Newby told the *Record*. 'However, we are not satisfied with some of her testimony. She will be questioned further soon.'

"Asked whether he was referring to strong rumors around headquarters last night, Chief Newby admitted that Miss Truslow is believed to be withholding testimony vital to the solution of the murder.

"By press time last night, Miss Truslow had not been located by newsmen. She is said to be hiding out somewhere in town.

"Prosecutor Odham could not be reached," *etc., etc.*

The *Record* story's "Exclusive" tag was an understandable brag. Wire service and metropolitan newspaper reporters had invaded Wrightsville at the first flash of Foster Benedict's slaying, and the war for news raged through the town. The *Record* disclosure almost wrecked Stanley Bluefield's plans to take up his personal war with Wrightsville's Philistines where mere murder had broken it off.

Stanley had sent out a call for his entire company. They converged on The Playhouse on the morning the *Record* story broke to find the forces of the press drawn up in battle array. In a moment the surrounded locals were under full-scale attack; and Stanley, purple from shouting, sent to police headquarters for reinforcements.

A wild fifteen minutes later Chief Newby laid down the terms of a truce.

"You people have one hour out here for interviews with Mr. Bluefield's company," the Chief snapped. "Nobody gets into the theater after that without a signed pass from me."

As it turned out, the newsmen retired from the field in less than half their allotted time. One of their two main objectives was not present: Ellery had slipped out of the Hollis early in the morning and disappeared.

Their other target, Joan, who showed up at the Playhouse with Roger, had refused to parley. To every question fired at her about "the testimony vital to the solution" that she was reported to be withholding, Joan looked more frightened and shook her head violently. "I have nothing to say, nothing," she kept repeating. Nor would she reveal where she was staying.

On being attacked in his turn, Roger became totally deaf. In the end he had charged into the theater with her, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the press beat a disgusted retreat shortly after, to bivouac at various High Village bars.

Chief Newby stationed police at the stage entrance, fire exits, and in the lobby, and left for an undisclosed destination.

So it was with slightly hysterical laughter that the company greeted Stanley Bluefield's opening words: "Alone at last."

They were assembled onstage under the working lights. Stanley had hopped up on a set chair.

"You'll all be happy to hear that we're going right ahead with *The Death of Don Juan.*" He raised his little paw for silence. "With due respect to the late Foster Benedict, he saw fit to make a farcical joke out of our production. We're going to do it *properly.*"

Someone called out, "But Mr. Bluefield, we don't have a Don Juan."

Stanley showed his teeth. "Ah, but we will have, and a good one, too. I can't disclose his name because I haven't completed the business arrangements. He should be joining us the day after tomorrow.

"I spent most of yesterday making cuts and line changes and revising some of the business, especially in Act One, where I think we've been in danger of wrong audience reactions. Today and tomorrow we'll go over the changes, so we ought to be in good shape when our new Don Juan gets here. Meanwhile, as a favor to me, Mr. Manson has kindly consented to walk through the part for us. Does anyone need a pencil . . . ?"

They plunged into the work with relief.

The day passed quickly. Sandwiches and coffee were brought in twice. There was only one interruption, when a tabloid photographer tried to get into the theater by stretching a ladder across the alley between a window in the next building and The Playhouse roof. But he was intercepted, and an extra policeman was assigned to the roof.

It was almost ten o'clock when Stanley called a halt.

The company began to disperse.

"Not you, Miss Truslow!"

Joan stopped in her tracks. It was Chief Newby.

"I haven't wanted to interfere with Mr. Bluefield's working day. But now, Miss Truslow, you and I are going to have a real old-fashioned heart-to-heart talk. Whether it takes five minutes or all night is up to you. I think you know what I'm talking about."

Joan groped for one of the set chairs. "I have nothing to tell you! Why won't you let me alone?"

"She's out on her feet, Chief," Roger protested. "Can't this wait?"

"Not any more," Newby said quietly. "You stay where you are, Miss Truslow, while I get rid of those newspaper men outside. I don't want the papers in on this just yet. I'll come back for you when the street's clear."

The theater emptied. Lights began winking out. One harsh spotlight remained onstage. Joan cowered in its glare.

"Roger, what am I going to do? I don't know what to do."

"You know what to do, Joanie," Roger said gently.

"He won't let go of me till . . ."

"Till what? Till you tell him what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you're hiding?" Roger pushed a curl of damp blonde hair back from her forehead. "I know you've been hiding something, darling. I've known it longer than Newby. What is it? Can't you tell even me?"

Joan's hands quivered in her lap.

"He's bound to get it out of you tonight."

"Rodge—I'm afraid."

"That's why I want you to share it with me, baby. Look, Joan, I love you. What good would I be if I didn't share your troubles?"

"Rodge . . ."

"Tell me."

She swallowed twice, hard, looked around nervously. The deep silence of the theater seemed to reassure her.

"All right. All right, Rodge . . . The other night—during the intermission—when I was in my dressing room feeling so hurt by Foster's not remembering me . . ."

"Yes?"

"I decided to go down to his dressing room and—and . . . Oh, Rodge, I don't know why I wanted to! Maybe to tell him what I thought of him . . ."

"Hurry it up," Roger urged her. "The reason doesn't matter! What happened?"

"I was about to step onto the ladder from the landing when I heard Foster's dressing room door open below, and . . . *I saw him.*"

"The murderer?" Roger cried.

Joan nodded, shuddering. "I saw him sneak out . . . and away."

"Did you recognize him?"

"Yes."

"But my God, Joan, why didn't you tell Newby?"

"Because he'd accuse me of making it up. At that time the Chief was sure I'd done it."

"But now he knows you didn't!"

"Now I'm just plain scared, Roger."

"That Benedict's killer will come after you? He's not getting the chance!" Roger cupped her chin fiercely. "You're ending this nightmare right now, young lady. Let me get out of these work clothes, and then you're going outside to tell Newby who murdered Benedict—and the more reporters that hear it the better. Don't move from here, Joanie. I'm only going as far as the prop room—I'll be right back."

The darkness swallowed him. His rapid footsteps died away.

Joan found herself alone on the stage.

She was perched stiff-backed on the edge of the big Spanish chair at the base of the light cone formed by the spot. There was no other light anywhere. The dark surrounded and held her fast, like walls.

The dark and the silence. The silence that had reassured her before, now made her uneasy.

Joan began to move her head. They were small, jerky movements. She kept probing here and there with furtive glances, over her shoulder, toward the invisible wings, out into the crouching blackness beyond the dead footlights.

"Rodge?" she called.

The quaver of her own voice only brought the silence closer.

"*Roger?*"

Joan curled up in the chair suddenly, shut her eyes tight.

And as if drawn to the place of her imprisonment by her fear, a bulky blob of something detached itself from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the murky upstage formlessness and crept toward the light.

It began to take stealthy shape.

The shape of a man.

Of a man with something gripped at chest level.

A knife.

"*Now!*" Ellery's roar dropped from the catwalk far over the stage like a bomb.

Quick as Chief Newby and his men were, Roger was quicker. He hurtled out of the wings and launched himself at the man with the knife like a swimmer at the start of a race. He hit the man at the knees and the man went over with a crash that rattled the stage. The knife went skittering off somewhere. The man kicked out viciously, and Roger fell on him and there was a sickening *crack!* and the man screamed, once. Then he was still.

As soon as he could, Chief Newby hurried to the set chair. "That was as good an act as Broadway ever saw! And it took real guts, Miss Truslow." He bent over the chair, puzzled. "Miss Truslow?"

But Miss Truslow was no longer acting. Miss Truslow had peacefully passed out.

ACT III. Scene 4.

One of the waitresses in the Hollis private dining room was clearing the table as the other poured their coffee.

"I hope you didn't mind my choice of menu, Joan," Ellery was saying.

Under the cloth her fingers were interwoven with Rogers. "How could I mind such a lovely steak?"

"I was commemorating the steak knife he lifted from the Hollis in your honor."

"In case I forgot?" Joan laughed. "That was the longest dream of my life, Ellery. But I'm awake now, and that's even lovelier."

"Queen, where's the dessert you promised?" Chief Newby asked. "I've got a lot to do at headquarters."

"No dessert for me," Joan said dreamily.

"Likewise," Roger said likewise.

"You don't eat this dessert," the Chief explained, "you listen to it. Anyway, *I'm* listening."

"Well, it goes like this," Ellery began. "I kept urging Benedict, as he was dying, to tell me who stabbed him. When he was able to get some words out, seconds before he died, Conk Farnham and I were sure we heard him say, 'The heroine'—an unmistakable accusation of you, Joan. You were heroine of the play, and Benedict didn't know—or, as it turned out, didn't remember—your name.

"But then the toothmark test proved Joan's innocence. Dying men may accuse innocent persons falsely in mystery stories, but in life they show a simple respect for the truth. So Benedict couldn't have meant the heroine of the play. He must have meant a word that sounded like heroine but meant something else. There's only one word that sounds like heroine-with-an-e, and that's heroin-without-an-e.

"The fact was," Ellery continued, "at the very last Benedict wasn't answering my who-did-it question at all. His dying mind had rambled off to another element of the crime. Heroin. The narcotic."

He emptied his coffee cup, and Chief Newby hastily refilled it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But no drug was found," Joan protested. "How did drugs come into it?"

"Just what I asked myself. To answer it called for reconstructing the situation.

"When Act One ended, Benedict entered the star dressing room for the first time. He had forgotten to bring along his make-up kit and Arch Dullman had told him to use the make-up in the dressing room. In view of Benedict's dying statement, it is now clear that he must have opened one of the boxes, perhaps labeled make-up powder, and instead of finding powder in it he found heroin."

"Benedict's finding of the drug just pointed to the killer," Newby objected. "You claimed to be dead certain."

"I was. I had another line to him that tied him to the killing hand and foot," Ellery said. "Thusly:

"The killer obviously didn't get to the dressing room until Benedict was already there—if he'd been able to beat Benedict to the room no murder would have been necessary. He'd simply have taken the heroin and walked out.

"So now I had him standing outside the dressing room, with Benedict inside exploring the unfamiliar make-up materials, one box of which contained the heroin.

"Let's take a good look at this killer. He's in a panic. He has to shut Benedict's mouth about the drug before, as it were, Benedict can open it. And there's the tool chest a step or two from the door, the tape-handled knife lying temptingly in the tray.

"Killer therefore grabs knife.

"Now he has the knife clutched in one hand and all he has to do is open the dressing room door with the other—"

"Which he can't do!" Newby exclaimed.

"Exactly. The haft of the knife showed his teeth marks—he had held the knife in his mouth. A man with two normal hands who must grip a knife in one and open a door with the other has no need to put the knife in his mouth. Plainly, then, he didn't have the use of *both* hands. One must have been incapacitated.

"And that could mean only Mark Manson, one of whose hands was in a cast that extended to the elbow."

Joan made a face. "Really, Roger, was it necessary to break his wrist all over again last night?"

"It was him or me—or you." Roger leaned over and kissed her. Joan blushed.

"Don't mind these two," Newby said. "You sure make it sound easy, Queen!"

"I shouldn't have explained," Ellery sighed. "Well, the rest followed easily. The hospital said they would keep Manson under observation for twenty-four hours. So he must have been discharged too late on opening night to get to the theater before the play started. He must have arrived during intermission.

"With the audience in the alleys and the fire exit doors open, all Manson had to do was drape his jacket over his injured arm to conceal the cast, mingle with the crowd in the alley, stroll into the theater, and make his way to the backstage door on the side where the star dressing room is. He simply wasn't noticed then or afterward, when he slipped out and parked in the Hollis

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bar—where Dullman and the *Record* reporter found him."

"But Mark Manson and *dope*," Joan said.

Ellery shrugged. "Manson's an old man, Joan, with no theatrical future except an actors' home and his scrapbooks. But he's still traveling in stock, hitting small towns and big-city suburbs. It's the perfect cover for a narcotics distributor. No glory, but loot galore."

"He did a keen Wrightsville business before he took that tumble. We've already picked up the two local pushers he supplied." Chief Newby folded his napkin grimly. "Middlemen in the dope racket are usually too scared to talk, but I guess the pain of that wrist you broke for him all over again, Fowler, was kind of frazzling. Or maybe he figures it'll help when he comes up on the murder rap. Anyway, Manson got real chatty last night. The Feds are pulling in the big fish now."

Ellery pushed his chair back. "And that, dear hearts, as the late Mr. Benedict might have said, is my cue to go on—on to that vacation waiting for me in the Mahoganies."

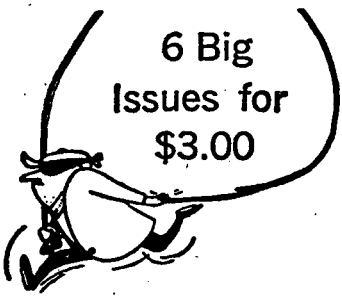
"And for yours truly it's back to work," Newby said, pushing his chair back too.

"Wait! Please?" Joan was tugging at Roger's sleeve. "Rodge . . . haven't you always said—?"

"Yes?" Roger said alertly.

"I mean, who wants to be an actress?"

That was how it came about that young Roger Fowler was seen streaking across the Square that afternoon with young Joan Truslow in breathless tow, taking the short cut to the Town Clerk's office, while far behind puffed the Chief of Police and the visiting Mr. Queen, their two witnesses required by law.



Loaded With Mystery Thrills

Bigger than ever before—better than ever before: EQMM is the best buy ever!

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
505 Park Avenue / New York, N.Y. 10022

Please enter my special subscription to ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE—big issues for $3.00.

☐ $3 enclosed ☐ Bill me later

Name _____ (Please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DISCOVERY . . .

a crime story by FRANÇOISE SAGAN

Françoise Sagan wrote her first novel, BONJOUR TRISTESSE, *during the boredom of a Paris summer, in 1953, when she was "forcibly caged" to cram for her examinations at the Sorbonne (how much cramming could she have done?). She was only 18 at the time, and her first novel became an international success, to be translated into 20 languages. Her next book,* A CERTAIN SMILE, *surpassed all expectations for a second novel—it too proved a triumph, and proved that* BONJOUR TRISTESSE *was not a "flash in the pan."*

*After that—*THOSE WITHOUT SHADOWS *and* AIMEZ-VOUS BRAHMS *and, in 1962,* THE WONDERFUL CLOUDS*—all books that, in their own way, symbolize at least one aspect of our life and times. And Françoise Sagan has also written plays, an avant-garde ballet, songs, magazine articles, and short stories, including the crime story we now offer you—a remarkable story that, in her own fashion, combines slick sophistication with a deep understanding of the human heart . . .*

Françoise Sagan once said: "I shall live badly if I do not write; I shall write badly if I do not live" . . . She lives—and her characters live.

A CRAVING FOR VIOLENCE

by FRANÇOISE SAGAN

"WE OUGHT TO HAVE A DRINK," Paméla said in a plaintive voice. "You aren't very gay this evening, you three."

They were sitting on the Gritti terrace. Venice was black and green and beautiful; they were handsome, themselves, Gilles and Paméla Mendille, Anna and André Bassen. They were all between thirty and forty. But they were not gay, and only Paméla insisted on being gay.

Paméla was fair and heedless and —contrary to general opinion—not at all stupid. People simply would not believe that any intelligence could be so little used. Paméla's was acute enough to be aware that some-

Copyright 1955 by Françoise Sagan; originally titled "Murder and the Menu"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing, this evening, was wrong; but she could not know that her own husband, the very dark, very engaging Gilles, had for the past six months been the lover of her friend Anna, and that yesterday he had declared to Anna his intention of breaking off the affair.

Nor did she know that Anna was taking it very badly, that André Bassen had known for two months, and that his knowledge was the source of his bleak smile, his silences. As far as Paméla was concerned, she was in Venice with her husband and two delightful friends. They were very comfortable at the Gritti; all was well. And Gilles kept glancing at her with tenderness and gratitude. His wife's airiness, that superficial yet boundless pleasure in living, had in the end released him from Anna and the tumults of passion.

"We drank a lot too much yesterday, Paméla my pet," André said. "We'll lose our livers in Venice."

He glanced with anxiety at his wife; Anna was silent and pale. Awfully pale. Something must have broken between her and Gilles. Maybe with a great deal of patience and gentleness he would be able to . . . In André a sort of pity was displacing his earlier hatred; a tender sort of pity, so tender . . .

"Let's have one 'dry,' anyway," Gilles said.

He needed it. The last scene with Anna had been worse than painful. "I won't let you go . . ." She wearied him. He glanced at the lovely troubled face and felt uneasy.

"Good idea," Anna said.

She closed her hands over her purse, felt the small hard pressure under her fingers, and her heart lurched. The little revolver, black and shiny, quiet in her purse like a pet animal; soon, now, it would wake, spit like a snake from her hand.

Paméla would look vastly astonished, André would try to stop her, and Gilles's face would be for an instant distorted by fear. Then he would fall heavily across the table. Perhaps there would be time, before the crowd closed in, for her to lift his beautiful head, watch the blood gush from his beautiful body. Suddenly she was filled with an immense love for Gilles dead.

"So let's have a Martini," she said imperiously.

"I'm going to try the Venetian duck," Paméla said. "I hope they're not raised on the canal. André, you know everything; promise me they're honest-to-goodness freshwater ducks."

"I swear it," André said.

"André would swear to anything," Gilles said. "He's the most ignorant man alive."

"And you," Anna thought swiftly, "you who used to swear that you loved me, that you would always love me. Your promises, your laughter, your hands . . ."

She lowered her gaze to Gilles's hands. They were broad and long,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather blunt. Far less attractive than André's. But they were necessary to her, those hands, no others. She had known for two months that there was something irreparable about her passion for Gilles. She who had never taken love very seriously . . .

And maybe that was the cause of this nightmare. You play, you choose, you cast aside—and then one day you find out that you can't live without one certain person, or that he is living with somebody else and must die before you can again endure the light of day.

She picked up her glass, emptied it. Paméla was laughing. Anna stared at her for a moment, and suddenly saw her dressed in black. She would be exquisite. Poor Paméla—so little to blame for all this. Anna had hated her so when she went to her room with Gilles. Anna, standing in the hall with André, watched them go laughing up the stairs. Paméla was Gilles's wife, he lived with her, woke at her side. Yes, Anna had hated her. But now, looking at her, so fair, so heedless, Anna's eyes filled with tears.

"Let's go in to dinner," Gilles said. "I'm starving."

He was always hungry after making love, too, Anna thought. Perhaps it's normal for him to be hungry after partings. But if he knew what is waiting for him at dinner . . .

She began to laugh and wondered if she might be going insane. Paméla gave her an astonished glance, then laughed too, sharing a secret. Whenever anyone laughed without apparent reason, Paméla confidingly laughed too. Anna stood up and, holding her bag tight, swept into the dining room . . .

"What will you have?" Gilles asked with an attentive air.

Already he was trying out the "dear friends" pose he had suggested to her yesterday. She could see it now: "Dear old Anna"—and in a few years, perhaps with a tender glance into her eyes: "Dear Anna, to think that once . . ." And as a general rule, that was exactly the way these things went.

Only—bad luck for poor Gilles—she loved him. She loved him passionately. She remembered that first night, in the hotel on the Quai Voltaire, Gilles's roughened voice, the light falling gold on his shoulders. She closed her eyes a moment. This was not the time to cry.

"Anna's going to have grapefruit, as usual," Paméla said. "I'd like a pâté, please."

Paméla's formidable appetite was a constant source of amazement.

"A whole pâté, in the evening?" Gilles said, outraged.

"But darling, there's no garlic in it," Paméla said innocently. "So what does it matter to you?"

André burst out laughing. Gilles glanced furtively at Anna. Her eyes were half closed, and there was a curious smile on her lips. A motionless and rather terrifying smile. She seemed to be thinking of something

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

else and yet, at the same time, to be horribly sentient and aware.

If only she doesn't make a scene, Gilles thought suddenly. But that wasn't like Anna. Not in public. She was too careful of other people's opinions, far too concerned with her own reputation to let anyone else know that she was in love with him. A little spasm of satisfied vanity made him straighten his shoulders.

Anna stared at him and resumed her smile. She was going to kill him. Two shots—or three. For that cruel smile, for all the tender smiles gone with the past. For the nights of love and days of complicity. For that last night of tears. For many bad reasons and one very good one.

"Grapefruit for me, too," André said. "What about you, Gilles?"

Anna was drawing a circle on the table with her knife. The same as the circle she had kept revolving in for two days now, like a sick animal. She abandoned her knife for the grapefruit. It had an odd flavor; she liked that. *Do they have grapefruit in prison?* This was probably the last one she would ever eat.

All at once, she was filled with tenderness, with affection—for her past life, for grapefruit, for evening gowns, for travel—for all the things that no longer had any taste. For André. Had he heard her crying in the night?

She glanced at him but he was not looking at her. He was talking to Paméla. He had always been very fond of darling Paméla. As Gilles had said, cynically, in the beginning: "It could be worked out very neatly . . ." Only it hadn't worked out at all. Not at all.

"What I love about Venice . . ." André was saying.

But she was not listening to him. Usually she did, though. André had a great deal of taste, and it is very pleasant to have a husband with taste. Only his words had recalled others, at once whispered and shouted: "What I love about you . . ." Gilles used to say. "What I love . . ."

A sudden flush made her feel young again. Was it possible, could it be the same person, that beautiful suppliant animal at her mercy, and this cool, cautious man, this stranger?

"Gilles!" she said aloud.

Only André flinched at the tone of her voice. His hand started out to her, then fell back on the cloth. Gilles had turned his head away and Paméla seemed not to have heard. *I'm talking out loud,* Anna thought. *What voice was that?*

She began concentrating on practical details. How was she going to get the revolver out of her bag before they saw it? All at once they were turning into detectives, strangers, spies. These people whom she had loved—their warmth—everything became suddenly hostile, from another world. She was alone, and it was horrible.

"The wonderful thing to see," Paméla was saying, "is Gilles in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gondola. He gets up, he sits down, he's as restless as a cat. He feels that he's in danger. It's so funny."

Before starting, Anna had dreamed of those gondolas. Gilles still loved her: they had planned a thousand escapes, a thousand subterfuges. "A gondola with you . . ." she had told him. "You're making me dream like a schoolgirl."

In her imagination the water was green and black, she let her hand trail through it, and Gilles's hand scooped it out like some curious bit of seaweed. Her hand smelled of mud, of death, of old stones; Gilles said that he loved that stale odor, and his eyes took fire . . . But in actuality the gondolas rode so high above the water that the hand could not reach it. And Gilles was not in the same gondola . . .

"What do you think of the duck?" Paméla said. "I do have some good ideas, don't I?"

"You have nothing but good ideas," André said. "The duck is wonderful. You won't get a wink of sleep all night, but who cares?"

You certainly won't get a wink of sleep, Anna thought with a small inward smile. The police must go around in a motorboat, with sirens. Ridiculous idea! Where am I? They'll have fantastic passport trouble. And how will they get Gilles's body back to Paris? For her, it was simple. The Government, Justice would take charge of her. Everything was so well organized; she had only to go along . . .

"Anna, try the duck, darling," André said.

He was leaning toward her, his face affectionate, a bit drawn. He is suffering, she thought, and I am going to make him suffer more. Something inside her wavered.

"I'll cut it for you," Gilles said. "I know all about a duck's anatomy."

He picked up his knife and fork and began to dissect her duck, smiling. Paméla was smiling, too, affectionately, and André had laid his hand for an instant on hers. And she, meanwhile, was plotting calamity for them, was betraying them. What nightmare is this? she thought. I could never do it . . .

She sighed; the rigidity went out of her. It was over, she surrendered, she gave up; she would suffer still, a little more; André would help her. He was good.

She looked at them and smiled faintly herself.

"There!" Gilles said. "All you have to do is chew it, but be careful of the bones."

He passed her the plate, smiling. She looked at him for a moment with deep affection. My darling, my poor darling, I give you up—you, your death, our love. My poor darling, be happy. The duck had an odd flavor.

"This must be a canal duck, after all," she said smiling.

Paméla cried out in protest. They all began to laugh. Anna felt weak and at peace. She was eager, now, to go up to their room, to lie beside André, to take refuge against his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulder. She was old and tired, she would like to have had children . . . For the first time! As for the revolver, she would throw it out of her window into the canal. A fine gesture, too. How many revolvers rested at the bottom of the canal?

"There's the orchestra, at last," Paméla said eagerly.

And now Paméla, sitting down, would go through all the motions of dancing, with a look almost of pain, until André or Gilles asked her to dance. The orchestra was tuning up.

Then it began to play. A muted clarinet traced the melody, *I'm Confessing*, the piano followed, and Gilles turned his head away.

That tune—Anna had danced to it everywhere with him. It was their password. They had requested it of a score of orchestras, hummed it together; it was theirs. A dozen recollections, a dozen evenings surged back into Anna's memory; she leaned backward slightly and felt against her spine the hard pressure of the revolver.

She knew that these two minutes had been no more than a truce, that all this was not to be endured: Venice, the laughter, Gilles's presence, that melody. She knew that she must act.

"Four coffees," Gilles said.

"Want to dance, Paméla?" André said, smiling.

Paméla was on her feet at once. She danced very well, her fair hair gleaming under the chandelier. Gilles smiled a little. Then he turned back to Anna with an air of constraint.

"Dance, Anna?"

"No," she said quickly. Then she thought, The last dance . . . the last incomparable . . . Oh, let's be melodramatic right up to the end!

She rose, walked to the floor, and turned toward Gilles, against Gilles who took her into his arms. Once more her body found its long-accustomed place, the long-familiar motions, her hand the firm shoulder, her cheek the warm cheek. She felt herself sinking through limitless despair.

"The vocalist is very good," Gilles said in a guarded voice.

Vocalist? Was someone singing?

I'm confessing that I love you . . .

But the time for confessions was past. And in any case Gilles was not one to confess a passion but to announce it. The air he'd had at the Revel's that first time, dancing: "Anna, Anna, I'm afraid I'm in love with you."

She had laughed. "What an idea, Gilles!"

Then, after a pause, "But what a nice idea."

He had pulled her closer into his arms and she had thought: a new adventure. Gilles's cheek burning against hers, the marvelous record playing—*I'm Confessing*, it was called. A week later she had gone with Gilles to the Quai Voltaire.

The clarinet stabbed her with pain. Gilles said nothing, stiffened imperceptibly. He must be afraid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that she would cling to him. She was swept by a violent gust of contempt, felt a sudden craving for the chilled hard weight in her hand, the dry crack of the shots. A craving for violence.

"Let's sit down. They're never going to be finished with this one," Anna said.

He went with her, visibly relieved. André and Paméla joined them. Anna felt herself already set apart from them; her ears were ringing.

"I am definitely at my best tonight," Paméla said. "And André's much better than he used to be. My shoes are practically unmarked."

"Ingrate!" André said. "You make me do some of the most outlandish steps. Don't be surprised—"

For Anna, it was the end. Something in her gradually congealed as she reached for her bag, opened it. The blood pounded at her temples. Her hands were precise and steady. Something was already dead—her past, her life, her childhood—it was all over.

"Anna!" André cried.

Paméla looked vastly astonished. Gilles's face was for a moment distorted with fear; she fired, and he crumpled forward across the table. Instantly there was a terrible seething of motion about her, shouts, strange hands that dragged her back, and she had no chance to lift his head, to look one last time into the face of her love.

NEXT MONTH . . .

an All-Star Issue to celebrate EQMM Number 250

***NEW* detective *short novel*—complete!**

MICHAEL GILBERT's *Stay of Execution*

distinguished and unusual stories by

RUFUS KING
AGATHA CHRISTIE
LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN
LESLIE CHARTERIS
DOROTHY L. SAYERS

The September 1964 issue will be on sale August 4, 1964.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A detective story with an unusual theme—the old fighter planes of World War I . . . the Spad S-7, the Halberstadt CL-II, the Sopwith 1½ Strutter, the Nieuport Sparrowhawk (there is a strange magic in those names), all remembered by a man with a deep affection for antique fighter craft, and all a fascinating and novel background to "detection with a difference" . . .

DEATH IN THE AIR

by ALLEN KIM LANG

SMALL CLOUDS WERE PUSHING through the sky like free balloons; the breeze was spraying squadrons of seedpuffs off suburban dandelions; and the wind had that laundry fragrance it takes on after an early rain—the smell that means good carburetion to an antique engine nut.

No wings for me today, though. I had to sweat at the drawing board and slave in the lab. My partners and I were dining with an Air Force Materiel Command officer tomorrow evening, and the Colonel would demand to see more proof of my heat-sniffing missile nose than the poetic science-fiction I'd sent so far to Dayton.

Greta Herschelle trotted out from the accounting office to unlock the door while I was fumbling for my key. A full partner in our little "spaghetti-works," she had been at the company's books an hour or more before Willy Marsh and I showed up. Six feet of energy stacked like an ad for vitamins, Greta was tan and smooth as a chocolate malt, with eyes blue as sparks off copper. Widowed by a fighter-pilot who had "bought a farm" in North Korea, she'd used the insurance to bankroll the first gimmick Willy and I designed, the black box that had established us as purveyors to the Pentagon.

"Blast it, Greta," I said, stepping inside. "I hurry off to work with my head full of wiring diagrams, catch sight of you, and can't think of another thing all day but string music and seduction."

"Save the prop wash for that waitress you've been ogling in the plant cafeteria, Teddy," she said. "Thought you were taking the day off?"

"Don't dare to," I said. "We're racing (a) the local competition, and (b) the Russians; so I'd better breadboard that thermistor snivie of mine in time to show it off to the Wind Force turkey who's flying in from Wright-Patterson."

"Tom-Swiftly, I inquire, What is the device that inspires such haste from our young engineer?" Greta

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked. "Did we win the contract for a feedback-activated back scratcher?"

"America doesn't want her boys in orbit itching, he rasped," I said. "Partner, my lips are sealed. For all your feminine mystery, you lack the crass Q-Clearance."

I went over to my desk and picked up the model Spad S-7, the cocky little fighter that the Stork Group had used as a Hun swatter in '16 and '17. Frankly, I liked these primitive kites better than the cold birds we were fitting with electronic rattlesnake senses.

"Rat-a-tat-tat, she machine-guns," Greta said.

I grinned. "Gorgeous, you're reading my thoughts. I'd love to cut up into our summer sky and shoot some poor devil down to dirt. Gotta work, though; and my talk to the Quest Club luncheon is today."

"Here's the public relations pitch," she said, handing me half a dozen typewritten sheets of paper. "It runs to ten minutes if you drawl a bit. I called the Chamber of Commerce to arrange for a screen and projector. You're to show films of one of your dogfights with Willy. Okay?"

I glanced through the talk Greta had titled, *I Fly a Time Machine.* Sound stuff. The girl knew our fabric-covered pterodactyls almost as intimately as Willy Marsh and I did, and she was an adequate pilot, besides. "I'd kiss you for doing this, baby, but it might complicate our partnership," I said.

Greta shook her head. "I've covered the love-and-kisses route, Teddy," she said. "No more."

She sat on the desktop to my right as I opened the trophy case where Willy and I displayed the silver cups with which we commemorated our aerial contests. The great von Richthofen had awarded himself eighty of these cups; we had eleven between us.

I picked up the most recent trophy. Engraved on its side was the legend, *MARSH: downed Halberstadt CL-II, 4 July '63.* I'd been "shot down" in that dogfight, flying the World War I Boche two-seater that Willy and I had rebuilt from junk discovered in the toolshed of a German quarry.

Under the trophy case, where Willy Marsh's six cups out-aced my five, were the reels of movies shot from the machine gun mountings of our antique kites as we sparred across the heavens. I put Willy's cup back.

"I can work all night if I have to," I said. "I've got half a mind to take the morning off after all, he Tom-Swifted airily."

"Willy thought you would," Greta said. "He set out for the barn half an hour ago. Says he'll meet you over the State Park at five thousand feet."

"Which crate is he flying?"

"The Halberstadt," she said. "He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wants to give you a chance to get even."

"I'll stitch him to his fuselage," I said. I burst into the chorus of my favorite folksong, a ditty composed, circa 1916, by the boys of the Lafayette Escadrille:

"*Take the cylinders out of my kidneys,*
The connecting rod out of my brain;
From the small of my back take the crankshaft,
And assemble the engine again."

"You have a lovely voice, she crowed," Greta said, then clapped her hands over her ears. "Consider it taken back," she said.

I got my Teddy Bear suit out of the desk drawer. Wearing these flying suits was more than tradition. At thirteen thousand feet, the operational ceiling of my Sopwith 1½ Strutter, the air is cold as charity; and besides, the suit helps keep the stink of castor oil from getting fixed to the pilot's hide. The antisocial reek of our lubricant is what makes a hot shower so welcome at groundfall.

"If I'm not back in time for the Quest Club luncheon," I said, "have the local Air Scouts pelt the wreckage with roses."

Greta picked up a brown-wrapped parcel from the desk and handed it to me. "On your way to the field, Teddy, would you mind dropping this off at the Post Office? It's that relay Willy tested to death. The engineers called from California. They'd like to run a post mortem tomorrow."

"I'll stick on airplane stamps and send the cadaver winging to the Coast," I said.

What she asked was a nuisance. The Post Office is on the far side of town from our flying field, but I could never say "No" to a red-haired woman. I gave Greta a pat where she sat to demonstrate that I saw in her more than shrewd accountancy, then headed out to the parking lot.

Always a nut for machines, I like typing my own engineering reports on the office I.B.M. Electric. I stay up nights spotting satellites with my Questar. I even have an electric powered toothbrush. All the same, it's a shame machines have got the upper hand.

Flying the gaspipe I had over Korea, last time the Reserves made me pay for my Reserve Pay, was about as pulse-pounding as riding a drawing board. Even the gunnery was automated. It wasn't much more work to puncture a Mig than it is to type an underline with our plug-in typewriter: you just push down a key, and transistors do the work.

That's the reason Willy Marsh and I collected planes half again as old as we were. Those crates have a sea-level top of about 110 mph, but they darned well make the man in the pilot seat feel needed. After driving airplanes by the book, it's pure joy to fly by the seat of your pants.

After I'd wasted twenty minutes airmailing Greta's package, I bugged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out the back road toward our pasture. (One royces a Rolls; in a Buggatti, you bug). We didn't have a proper runway. The buses we fly have a yen for grass between their toes; they take to concrete like tiger kittens to water, ground-looping over the smooth surface as clumsily as four-year-olds learning to roller skate.

Our hangar was a huge red barn of the design celebrated in Hoosier song and legend, converted for the early Air Age by the addition of a windsock where once a haying winch had hung. The runway—to lend it a dignity it did not deserve—was the one-lane ribbon of gravel that the farmer had run up from the highway. The only modifications we'd made on the barn were a sprinkler system and a burglar alarm, the latter connected with the office of Chief Wolf of the village police force.

We owned an up-to-date Piper, which we used to commute hither and yon in pursuit of the engineering buck; the Halberstadt CL-II; the other two-seater, a 130-hp. Sopwith 1½ Strutter; a Spad S-7; a Nieuport Sparrowhawk that had been part of the Japanese Navy in the '20's; and a heap of nondescript trash a Continental con man had assured us was the remains of a truly great fighter, the Fokker Dr.-I, a triplane of the breed the Red Knight of Germany had spurred to battle.

Altogether, our collection of aerial antiquities had cost Willy and me about as much as a harem, and the upkeep would have given Paul Getty pause. No apologies, you understand. Once you get castor oil in your blood, rotary engines are welcome to eat you out of house and home.

Willy's car was parked beside the barn, together with the Jeep that belonged to Jimmy, the kid who mowed our grass to earn an occasional hour in the air. Jimmy was out on his mower at the moment, harvesting a fine crop of early thistle. I shouted. The boy waved and pointed into the sun. Peering up with a hand over my eyes, I saw the black-crossed Halberstadt up about two thousand, circling like a shark in swimmers' waters, eager to flash in and feast.

Jimmy retracted the mower's blade and putt-putted up to the barn to turn my prop for takeoff. I checked out our Sopwith. A trim, two-seater biplane with the office right under the forward-perking upper wing, this kite also had a rear cockpit designed for an observer-gunner. The canvas cover was pulled tight across the Scarff ring mounting here. Nearly fifty years ago that mount had held a Lewis gun. The pilot's sting had been a Vickers, synchronized to fire through the propeller's twelve-hundred-rpm blur. Now I had a camera there, ready to film my fight with Willy Marsh.

"Hi, Mr. Tedders," Jimmy yelled. He trotted up. "Mr. Marsh took off

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ten minutes ago. Where've you been?"

"Running errands for the fabulous Frau Herschelle," I said.

"You get tired of lending that doll a hand, have her give me a call," he said.

"Luxuries like Greta are reserved for us veterans, Junior," I said. "Stick with the bubble gum crowd."

"Sure, gramps."

I tested the controls, saw that my pistol, a long-barreled target Colt .32 that I kept in the Sopwith to justify its history as a warplane, was clipped to its holder under the panel, and nodded to the boy.

"Switch off," Jimmy called out.

"Switch off."

The kid pulled the propeller through three turns, to suck gas into the cylinders, then yelled, "Contact!"

"Contact."

Jimmy got the prop horizontal, grabbed it with both hands near the tip, kicked one foot like a pitcher set to deliver a fast ball, and yanked the propeller through compression. The old Clerget engine caught and settled into its meaty, gravel-truck rumble.

I let it warm for a few minutes, then eased on the throttle to let the beast roar full-throated. "Okay," I yelled, waving my right thumb. Jimmy pulled the wooden chocks from under my wheels, and I taxied out of the barn under the summer sky.

The Halberstadt wagged its wings above me, a boy's knock-the-chip-off-my-shoulder. It circled westward toward the State Park, the arena Willy Marsh had chosen for our slugging match.

I checked that my 8-mm. camera was bolted tight, then rolled down the grass and turned to face the Sopwith's nose against the billowed windsock. After a run of only a few feet, the tail rose till the plane was level. She rocked and bounced a bit farther, then jerked free of the earth and made me a bird. Gently as a balloon, I sailed across the barn. Jimmy waved and remounted his mowing machine.

The Sopwith was well matched with the plane Willy was flying. Both were two-seaters; and although his Halberstadt had a little more fire behind its prop, the extra weight of the German machine handicapped Willy's advantage.

Spinning off the rotary engine, castor oil fumes whipped back into my face. In a few minutes my throat would be bitter with the stuff. Taking this lubricant through the nose was no better than spooning it down from the bottle. When we landed, Willy would toast me, or I him, in blackberry brandy, the medicine French pilots had discovered is an excellent antidote to the unfortunate gastrointestinal effects of castor oil mist inhaled aloft.

The Indiana fields unwound beneath me. I imagined our Hoosier soil gashed with trenches and pock-marked with Hun shells, tortured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with concertinas of barbed wire, tainted with the smoke of battle. The guy wires sang on either side of me.

Willy Marsh would try to dazzle at me out of the sun, to get onto my tail before I knew he was in the neighborhood. To confuse him, to get a bird's-eye view of my sky, and just for the hell of flying a kite that responded like a whip-tip, I looped and twisted in an Immelman. The horizon tilted and flipped, tilted and flipped again. I was as much off the earth as any astronaut, sustained on gasoline and cotton fabric in a private atmosphere of noise and castor oil fumes.

The Halberstadt came gunning down out of the sun like a guilty conscience. I lead-footed the right rudder. The Boche plane swept under me, the big black plus-sign on its starboard wing close enough to strike a match on.

The gage had been thrown. The fight was on. I pressed the plunger of the camera, then gave my full attention to outwitting that leather-helmeted figure in the enemy plane.

Like twin heavyweights sparring, we circled one another. I stripped my gloves to feel the beat of my engine, to make myself part of the Sopwith's steel and fabric. I waited till the Halberstadt was where I wanted her, then poured the sauce to my throttle and dropped the two flaps at the roots of my crate's lower wing.

It was like catching a flying sandbag in the gut. The plywood cockpit groaned. The seatbelt cut into my middle as I skidded against the wind.

Marsh's plane shot ahead. I focused the sight of my camera over his cockpit and triggered. Fish in a barrel! I'd shot down my partner in the first round.

Blundering off like a skittish hippo seeking seclusion, the Halberstadt sank into a shoal of whipped-cream cumulus cloud.

Where was he? I glanced up through the skylights in my upper wing, raised my goggles, and circled. There he was, off to starboard, like a hawk giving a pigeon the come-on.

I fed the Sopwith full throttle and plunged to the right, my camera grinding into the dent in the Boche's upper wing where Willy's goggles flashed. Tearing ahead of him, I pushed forward in a short dive, pulled up till my prop was aimed at heaven, skidded back tail-first, then fell against my seatbelt as the Sopwith snapped end-for-end. This whipstall, the most violent trick you can do short of flying through a brick wall, was my way of thumbing my nose at Willy. I flatted out my dive and headed home.

I glanced over my right shoulder. The Hun was slipping off to the left, losing altitude. The Halberstadt came across me, the landing gear like the talons of an eagle set to grab. Willy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was getting even; he was going in flat and hard as a flung brick.

I circled over the beech trees as the Halberstadt hit like a plow blade, knifing a furrow through the grass as the steel tubes of its undercarriage telescoped against the fuselage. The crippled plane, tossing up trash like a power mower, cut into the trees. Drunk, hungover, or just mad at having been "shot down," Willy had no right to treat our high-priced hardware with such contempt.

I gritted my teeth and circled around to land on the far side of the barn, where there was room to do it right. If that stupid crash landing hadn't busted up Willy Marsh, I was going to have a try at it bare-handed.

I came in against the wind, holding the Sopwith up as if I wanted to fly six inches high forever, and landed gently as a mosquito on a sleeper's forehead. I ground-looped and taxied the two hundred yards around the barn toward the spinney of beeches that bordered the highway.

It was even worse than I'd thought. Tattered wing fabric, one scrap bearing a fluttering Maltese cross, hung from the outriding bushes. The plane itself was burrowed deep into the trees.

Stumbling along the ruts cut by the wounded warplane, I trotted toward the Halberstadt. The wings were torn from their roots. Wire sang as one of the tensed stringers popped loose. Smoke poured out of the engine, buried in the Vee between two close-growing beeches.

I leaped onto the junk and made my way over the ring mount to the pilot's seat. I snapped off the ignition switch and twisted shut the gasoline feed valve before I so much as glanced at the man strapped to the seat.

When I did, it was obvious that my partner's flying days were over.

I left the body strapped in the cockpit. A siren was howling down the highway. Somehow, the cops had got word a plane had pancaked. I'd let the law take Willy from his last pilot's seat.

I was well back from the wreck and the gasoline fumes, smoking a castor-oil flavored cigarette, when Police Chief Wolf, accompanied by another cop, drove the town's white squad car off the road, jolted up a furrowed patch of greensward, and stopped beside my Sopwith.

Wolf got out to stand beside me. The other man trotted into the trees, climbed up the tortured fuselage, and bent over the helmeted body inside.

"You got here quick, Chief," I said.

He patted the pockets of his uniform. "May I have a cigarette?" I gave him one and lit it. "I take it he's dead," Wolf said.

"Yes."

"Shame," the Police Chief said. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and tossed it away. I ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plained about our lubricating oil, and how it taints everything that rides behind the engine. Then Wolf told me how he'd seen the crash. "Like most men, Tedders, I'm a frustrated flyer. When I saw you two stunting around, we stopped the car and got out to watch. The German plane hit the trees when we weren't a quarter mile down the highway."

"Chief!" the policeman called from the wreck. "Better get over here."

Wolf walked into the clump of trees where the Halberstadt lay like crushed wastepaper. He and his man spoke together, glancing now and then at me. I got rid of my cigarette, conscious of the stink of gasoline in the air, and went in to join them.

"It looked like a broken neck to me," I said.

"No, Mr. Tedders," Police Chief Wolf said. "Your partner has been shot through the head." He walked back toward my plane.

"Shot?" I demanded. I leaped up onto the stump of the Halberstadt's port lower wing and peered into the cockpit. The policeman eased forward Willy Marsh's leather flying helmet. The hole plugged into the back of his head was as clean as though it had been cut with an apple corer.

"Shot," the cop repeated.

Wolf came back from the Sopwith, something in his hand.

"How?" I asked.

"You tell me, Mr. Tedders," Wolf said.

"Do think that I—"

"You were playing ducks and drakes with the man. Who else got close enough to kill him?" the Chief asked.

"We shoot at each other with 8-mm. cameras," I said. "We don't so much as own a machine gun."

Wolf held out my Colt target pistol, which he'd taken from the bracket in my plane. "It's been fired very recently," he remarked.

"Chief, I swear that gun hasn't been out of my Sopwith's cockpit in the last six months," I said.

"You see how it looks," Wolfe said.

"Ridiculous, that's how it looks," I said. "How the devil do you suppose I flew my plane, aimed at Willy Marsh's head, and fired, all at the same time? Chief, that plane behind us isn't any merry-go-round pony. It's as temperamental as a Hollywood star."

"Luck," Wolf said, his lips thin and white. "Bad luck, Tedders. You may have fired your pistol the way a schoolboy slams matchheads to the sidewalk, just to make a noise. It was sheer bad luck, if that's what happened, that your pellet of lead ended where it would do the both of you the most harm."

"Willy landed his plane," I pointed out. "How could a man with his brains shot open have managed that?"

Wolf gave me a humorless grin,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nodding toward the twisted carcass of plywood and fabric that we stood beside. "You call that a landing?" he asked me.

"I can't understand it," I said. "My Colt never left its holder in the cockpit till you took it out."

"We'll take your statement officially, Tedders," Wolf said. He turned to his assistant. "Guard the body, and don't let anybody touch either plane," he said. "I'll send Smitty back with the kits and the camera."

The policeman saluted, a gesture seldom encountered in our town, and stared at me as though trying to memorize the features of the first murderer he'd ever seen close up. I lowered my eyes and walked ahead of Chief Wolf to the white squad car.

We stopped at the barn to pick up Jimmy. He'd been busy locking up the rest of our planes against the expected invasion of rubbernecks. The boy got into the rear seat of the police car, his questions staunched by Wolf's brusque "Later!"

We drove up to the plant. We could hear Greta Herschelle hammering away at her accounting machine, alone in the office. I used my key to let us in.

Greta came out of her office. "Who shot who down?" she demanded.

"Greta," I began.

"From the death's-head look on your face, Teddy, I'd guess that Willy just won himself another cup," she said.

"He pranged it," I said.

"How bad?" Greta whispered, her hands fisted.

"He's dead," Wolf told her. "Sit down, now, all of you."

Greta began to sob. Jimmy went to the water cooler to fill a paper cup with ice water.

"How did it happen?" Greta asked.

"Someone shot him," Wolf snapped. "He died of gunshot, not of a sloppy landing."

Greta raised her blue eyes to pierce me.

"No!" I said.

She leaped at me as though her chair had been an ejection seat, her fists pounding at my chest. "Thief!" she screamed. "Murderer!"

Wolf stepped behind the woman and tugged her back from me. Her golden hair pressed against his chin as the Chief wrestled Greta Herschelle back to her chair and pressed her down into it. Then a bit breathless, Wolf stepped back.

"Why do you call Mr. Tedders a thief, Mrs. Herschelle?" he demanded.

"Ask him," she said, aiming an index finger at me like a gun. "Get the Company's books checked, and find out how he's eased out fifty thousand dollars in the past five months. Willy Marsh knew. He told me how to prove it. Tedders had to kill Willy to stay out of prison."

"Enough," Wolf said. He picked up the phone on my desk, next to the model Spad, and dialed. "Have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a stenographer come over to the office of Marsh, Tedders and Herschelle," he said into the phone. "Make it on the siren."

The Chief walked up to me and held out his hand. I shook out a cigarette for him. "It'll probably smell of castor oil," I warned him.

"Everything around here has that stink," he said. "The stink is in my nose."

He took the light I offered him. We smoked in silence until we heard the siren and saw the Mars light winking through the entrance door.

Two uniformed policemen entered the office crisply. The sergeant saluted Chief Wolf.

"Record these statements, Don," Wolf said. He clasped his hands behind his back and watched me as the younger cop seated himself and prepared to transcribe what we were about to say.

Wolf began with his own statement. "I was on County highway 101, north of town, at oh-nine-forty-five hours this morning, returning from a conference at the Dunes State Police Barracks," he began. "My driver was Patrolman Mungovan. Observing two unusual aircraft high up to the south, I directed Mungovan to halt at the side of the highway. We got out to watch the planes, which I identified as the antique Halberstadt and Sopwith owned jointly by Mr. Marsh and Mr. Tedders, the engineering partners of Marsh, Tedders and Herschelle."

"At about ten minutes before ten o'clock," Wolf continued, "we saw the Halberstadt losing altitude rapidly, the plane with British markings following it down. Thinking that something had gone wrong with the Halberstadt, Mungovan and I returned to our car and hastened to the scene of its landing. We found it crashed in the woods.

"Mr. Tedders was standing nearby, where he had landed his own plane without incident. After ascertaining that Marsh, pilot of the Halberstadt, was dead of a gunshot wound of the head, and after having taken from Tedders' Sopwith a Colt .32 revolver which gave evidence of having been recently fired, I returned with Tedders and Jimmy Hipskind to the offices of the engineering firm."

Wolf turned to the boy. "Jim, were you at the hangar when Marsh appeared there this morning?"

"Yes, sir. I turned his prop for takeoff," Jimmy said.

"How was the pilot of the Halberstadt dressed?" the Chief inquired.

"Helmet, goggles, flying suit—the works."

"Could you recognize his face?" Wolf asked.

"I know Mr. Marsh very well," Jimmy said.

"If I were to put on a flying suit, helmet, and goggles, and crouch down in the cockpit under the wing of the Halberstadt, with you out by the propeller," Wolf persisted, "would you recognize me?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Maybe not," the boy admitted. "If you put a male gorilla in one Teddy Bear suit, like they call 'em, and Sophia Loren in another, you'd have a time telling them apart."

"One more question, Jim," the Chief said. "Is there any route from town to your barn except County highway 101?"

"Yes," Jimmy said. "You know, Chief, the gravel road that leads through the woods where Mr. Marsh crash-landed. Loggers used to use it, when we had some walnut growing back that way."

"Thank you," the Police Chief said. He turned to me. "Mr. Tedders, did you go directly from this office to the airfield?"

"No, I stopped at the Post Office on the way," I said. "Greta had given me a package to mail."

"It was a broken relay," Greta explained.

"You've been alone in this office, Mrs. Herschelle, from the time Tedders left till we came to tell you of Mr. Marsh's death?" Wolf asked.

"Alone," she said.

"I tell you I didn't do it," I said, more to myself than to the others.

"I'm hoping for a confession, Mr. Tedders," Chief Wolf said.

"Confession?"

I jumped up to face the Police Chief. He stood with his hands still clasped behind him, calm as though this office were a classroom and the problem that engaged him a simple exercise in arithmetic.

"I did not kill Willy Marsh," I said. "I have not stolen any money from the partnership. Whatever Willy Marsh told Greta Herschelle about a fifty-grand shortage in our accounts, I know nothing about it."

"We need less heat, Tedders," Wolf said, "and more light. May I tell you how the events of this morning look to me?"

"Go ahead," I growled. "When you're finished, I'll call my lawyer."

"It appears that you, under attack by Marsh for having embezzled money from your partnership, took advantage of this morning's mock dog fight to shoot him," Wolf said.

"I didn't!"

"The explanation I've just proposed is by far the simplest available," Chief Wolf said. "It is not, however, correct."

Wolf stalked once around the office, then came to a halt behind Greta's chair. "Mrs. Herschelle," he said, "did anyone visit this office during the time you were alone here —that is, after Tedders left?"

"The mailman," she said. "He dropped several letters through the slot."

"Did you speak with him?"

"No," Greta said. "I was running an audit, back in my office—tracing down the shortage in our accounts."

"The postman would have heard you working?" Wolf asked.

"I suppose so," Greta said. "The accounting machine is as loud as a typewriter, and I answered the phone a few times. Just routine calls."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you own a dictating machine?" Wolf asked.

"Yes," Greta said. "But I wasn't using it this morning."

"We'll see," Wolf said. "This must be it." He took the gray plastic cover off the Dictaphone on Willy Marsh's desk and depressed the playback switch. "I'd like to hear the dead man's voice," he explained.

The red loop of recording belt began to turn. From the small speaker on the side of the machine came the sound, amplified to full power, of the accounting machine being steadily tapped. We heard a phone ring, then Greta Herschelle's voice answering it.

Wolf switched off the machine. "That is what the postman heard," he said. "Mrs. Herschelle, it my painful duty to charge you with the murder of your partner, Mr. Willy Marsh."

"I didn't!" she screamed.

"Please explain, then, why I smelled castor oil fumes in your lovely hair when I restrained you from striking Tedders," Wolf said. "Mrs. Herschelle, you left for the hangar just after Tedders started for the Post Office. You had twenty minutes to get to the hangar before Tedders and to kill Marsh. Don't you realize you have nitrate particles in the skin of your right hand, embedded there when you fired Tedders's borrowed pistol into Willy Marsh's head?—the pistol you borrowed from the Sopwith and returned to its holder under the panel before Tedders took off for the dogfight. What is the meaning of your recorded office noises if not meant to be a prepared alibi? As I said, Mrs. Herschelle, I hope to leave here with a confession."

Greta was staring at her right hand. "I did it," she said finally. "Willy discovered that I'd juggled the books to hide what I'd stolen. It belonged to me, you understand — I put all the money into this outfit in the first place. But Willy was going to charge me with theft. He threatened to send me to prison. So I went out to the airport this morning and shot him."

"And you wanted me to take the rap," I said.

Greta turned those electric-blue eyes on me. "Why not, Teddy?" she asked.

"Mr. Marsh didn't land that Halberstadt with a hole in his head," Jimmy said.

"Greta did it," I said. "Dressed in a flying suit and goggles, with a helmet over her head and her hair tucked under her collar. You assumed she was Marsh when you turned the prop for her."

"Where was Mr. Marsh?" Jimmy asked. "I saw him go into the hangar."

"He was a passenger," Chief Wolf said. "He was strapped down and covered with canvas in the observer's seat of the Halberstadt, already dead. After Mrs. Herschelle had crashed the plane under the trees, near where she'd hidden her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

car, she unfastened the body, tugged it into the pilot's seat, and strapped it in. While Tedders was taxiing up, she was running through the trees toward her car. She got back here to the office only minutes before we did. If she'd had time to wash the castor oil stink from her hair and burn that Dictaphone belt, Mrs. Herschelle might have gotten away with it."

"Why didn't Jimmy hear the shot in the hangar?" I asked.

"I was mowing grass," he explained. "A brass band could be practicing in the barn, and I'd never hear it."

"I didn't think about gunpowder tests," Greta Herschelle said. "I didn't think you could prove that I fired that gun. I remembered fingerprints, but I didn't know you could test for powder."

The Chief hid a smile—the test for nitrate particles is not dependable. Wolf turned to the man with the notebook. "Type it up," he said. "Have Mrs. Herschelle initial each page and any corrections, then take her in." He spoke to me. "Let's go, Mr. Tedders," he said.

"Where to?" I asked.

"You and Marsh were proud of following all the traditions of the early eagles, weren't you?" Wolfe asked me. "Old planes lovingly restored, the pomp and ceremony of combat, loving cups for victories? Isn't it true that those pilots also thought that a man who'd been badly frightened should fly again, right off, to get his courage back?"

"I've read that," I admitted.

"Well, Tedders, you've had a frightening morning," the Police Chief said. "I think you should go up again."

"With you as my passenger, I suppose," I said.

"Of course," Wolf said. "After all, it's my duty to inspect the scene of the crime."

CLASSIFIED

Rates $1.00 per Word

RARE BOOKS

Out of print mysteries? Our specialty. Aardvarks Book Detectives, Box 1749, Orlando, Fla. 32802

MYSTERIES (any books!) bought, sold; sample assortment: 10/7.50; Duane Johnson, Town & Gown Bookseller, 29 Carlisle, Gettysburg, Penna.

MYSTERY POCKETBOOK BARGAIN. 2000 Different $250. 1000 Different $100. 100 Different 35¢ Original Price For $12. 7 for $1. 100 Different 25¢ Original Price $8. 10 for $1. Good Condition. Prices Postpaid. Century, 2629 Lisbon, Milwaukee, Wis. 53205.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

I made $40,000.00 Year by Mailorder! Helped others make money! Start with $10.00—Free Proof. Torrey, Box 3566-T, Oklahoma City 6, Okla.

ATTENTION WRITERS! Book manuscripts wanted. All subjects considered. Greenwich Book Publishers, Inc., 282 Seventh Avenue, N.Y.C.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Box Score for 1963

In editing his second volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1964 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Anthony Boucher selected 17 stories as the best, and listed 99 others in his Honor Roll of 1963—a total of 116 distinguished stories of which one appeared only in book form. Here is the box score for the 115 best detective stories published in American magazines during 1963:

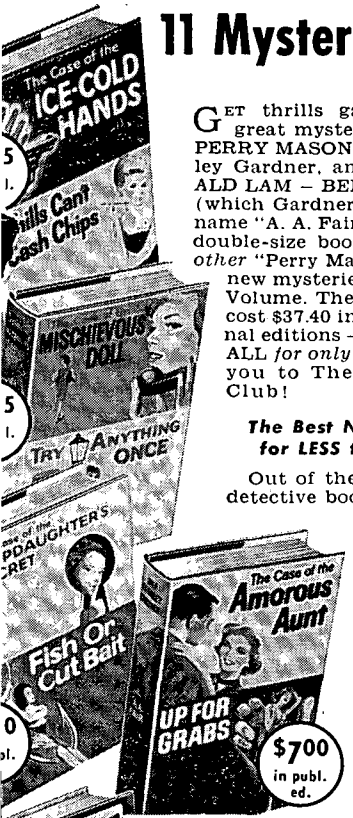
name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	59	51.3%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	16	13.9%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	11	9.6%
Rogue	5	4.3%
Playboy	4	3.5%
Manhunt	3	2.6%
Saturday Evening Post	3	2.6%
Cosmopolitan	2	1.7%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	2	1.7%
Monocle	2	1.7%
New Yorker	2	1.7%
Argosy	1	.9%
Bridge World	1	.9%
Eros	1	.9%
Fantastic	1	.9%
McCall's	1	.9%
This Week	1	.9%

In 1962, EQMM's percentage of Honor Roll stories of the year was 43.6%. In 1963, it was 51.3%. In other words, more than one-half of all the distinguished mystery stories published last year in American magazines appeared in EQMM; and this does not include the bonus of excellent reprints, both short stories and short novels, which EQMM offers every month . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inued from other side)

11 Mysteries—9 by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER for only $1.00


The Case of the ICE-COLD HANDS
MISCHIEVOUS DOLL
TRY ANYTHING ONCE
Fish Or Cut Bait
The Case of the Amorous Aunt
UP FOR GRABS
$700 in publ. ed.

GET thrills galore in ELEVEN great mysteries! Get four top PERRY MASON hits by Erle Stanley Gardner, and four top DONALD LAM – BERTHA COOL cases (which Gardner writes under pen name "A. A. Fair") in hard-bound double-size books . . . PLUS *another* "Perry Mason" and 2 MORE new mysteries in a giant Triple Volume. These ELEVEN would cost $37.40 in publishers' original editions – but you get them ALL *for only $1.00* to introduce you to The Detective Book Club!

The Best NEW Mysteries — for LESS than 97¢ each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" – by outstanding authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Mignon G. Eberhart, John Creasey and Van Wyck Mason. All THESE and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member you get THREE of them complete in one handsomely-bound triple volume (an $8.85 to $11.50 value in publishers' regular retail editions) for only $2.89.

Take ONLY the books you want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for ALL 11 Mysteries

Simply mail postcard promptly and we will send you at once the NINE Erle Stanley Gardner thrillers – PLUS the two other exciting mystery hits – all described on other side. However, this exceptional offer may never be repeated. Don't risk disappointment – mail postcard AT ONCE to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L.I., New York 11576

AIL THIS
STCARD
OW
YOUR
EVEN
STERIES
•
NO
POSTAGE
NEEDED

SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THIS POSTCARD 89-263

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB XJ
Roslyn, L.I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the FOUR double-length, hard-bound editions of Perry Mason & A. A. Fair thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1-volume Club selection containing another Perry Mason and 2 other great mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL FIVE volumes, containing ELEVEN first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge).

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future triple-volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address .....

City ... State Zone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ERLE STANLEY **GARDNER Fans! Look at this Mystery Value!**

The Case of the ICE-COLD HANDS
Shills Can't Cash Chips
TRY ANYTHING ONCE
The Case of the STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET
Fish Or Cut Bait
The Case of the Amorous Aunt
UP FOR GRABS

11 GREAT MYSTERI

INCLUDING **9** BY

ERLE STANLEY **GARDNER**

World's No. 1 Mystery Writer!

5 Perry Mason Thrille

and 4 **Donald Lam—Bertha Cool Myst**

by "A. A. Fair" (Gardner's other name!)

PLUS 2 MORE TOP DETECTIVE STORIE

~~$37.40~~ publ. ed. **YOURS** for only **$1** **0** as e mer

You get 8 GARDNER-FAIR Hits
in 4 double-size, full-length, hard-bound books

Volume 1

1 *Gardner's Case of the* AMOROUS AUNT
Perry's client, accused of murder, is the only witness!

2 *A. A. Fair's* UP FOR GRABS
Was the hospital sneak-out already *dead* when she left?

Volume 2

3 *Gardner's Case of the* STEPDAUGHTER'S SECRET
To handle a blackmailer, says Perry — *"Kill him!"*

4 *A. A. Fair's* FISH OR CUT BAIT
This time Bertha Cool is battling drugs *and murder!*

Volume 3

5 *Gardner's Case of the* MISCHIEVOUS DOLL
For deceiving a jury, Perry simply says *"No explanation!"*

6 *A. A. Fair's* TRY ANYTHING ONCE
For $2,000 will Donald Lam spend *one night* in a motel?

Volume 4

7 *Gardner's Case of the* ICE-COLD HANDS
Perry finds Marvin Fremont — dead in a *shower stall!*

8 *A. A. Fair's* SHILLS CAN'T CASH CHIPS
Donald Lam, on a fraud case, is *framed* for MURDER!

PLUS Another Exciting

Perry Maso

by ERLE STANLEY **GARDN**

AND

2 MORE

TOP-FLIGHT MYSTERIES IN THIS "3-in-1" VOLUME

9 The Case of DARING DIVO
by Erle Stan Gardner
A suspected m der weapon appears — the D.A. vow *put Perry Ma in San Quen*

10 THE SHRUNK HEAD
by Robert L.
A small ma aiming a de blowgun RIG AT YO HEAD!

11 FATAL
by Rae F
Cass E framed MURD leaves pris *take care of finished bu ness"!*

Continued on

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
First Class Permit No. 47 — Roslyn, N. Y.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED